



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

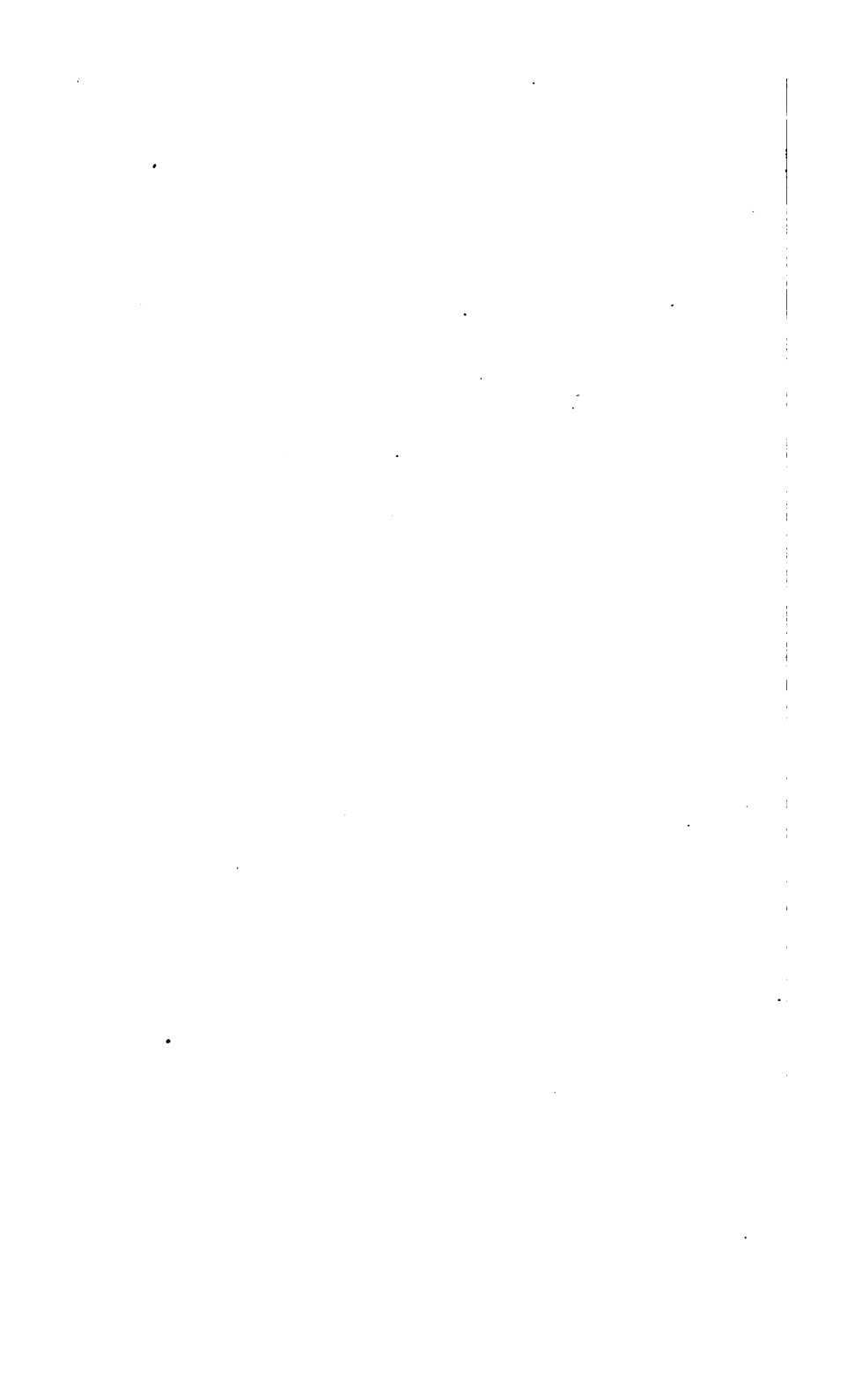
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





45.1516.





VILLAGE SERMONS,

PREACHED IN

THE PARISH CHURCHES

OF

LITTLE HADHAM, HERTS,

AND

HARTLEY WESPALL, HANTS.

BY

R. DRUMMOND B. RAWNSLEY, M.A.

LATE FELLOW OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD, AND CURATE
OF HARTLEY WESPALL.

LONDON:

J. HATCHARD AND SON, 187, PICCADILLY.

1848.

100. y. 151.

LONDON :

G. J. PALMER, PRINTER, SAVOY STREET, STRAND.

TO

HIS FATHER AND MOTHER,

This Volume of Sermons

IS INSCRIBED,

AS A TOKEN, HUMBLE BUT SINCERE,

OF THE FEELINGS OF FILIAL RESPECT, GRATITUDE, AND LOVE,

WITH WHICH THEY ARE REGARDED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

THESE Sermons are printed as they were preached ; and lay little claim to originality, either in thought or execution. They were composed for a congregation wholly agricultural, and principally of the labouring classes, with a view of setting forth some of the chief points of Christian doctrine and practice, in a language easy to be understood.

While aware how far short they fall of the mark at which he had aimed, the Author is encouraged to make them public from the assurance he has received, that by many they were gladly heard ; and from the fact that in some instances they seemed to have been influential for good.

At the same time he rejoices in this opportunity of testifying his gratitude and affection for that lamented Christian Teacher, under whom, for alas ! too short a while it was his fortune to be instructed. Without assenting to, nay though differing from,

several of Dr. Arnold's published opinions on ecclesiastical subjects, he is conscious of obligations to him for views of life and duty, and insight into Scriptural truth, which will, he trusts, always stay by him, and which he now most thankfully acknowledges.

•

C O N T E N T S.

SERMON I.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ROMANS xiii. 11.—“ And that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep ; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” - - - Page 1

SERMON II.

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ROMANS xv. 4.—“ For whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” 14

SERMON III.

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ST. MATTHEW xi. 10.—“ For this is he of whom it is wrtten, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.” - - - 26

SERMON IV.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 3.—“The Lord is at hand.” - 40

SERMON V.

THE BARREN FIG-TREE MAY NOT STAND.

ST. LUKE xiii. 6.—“A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard ; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.” - - - - - 52

SERMON VI.

ABRAHAM'S LIFE A LIFE OF FAITH.

GENESIS xv. 6.—“And he believed in the Lord ; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” - - - 66

SERMON VII.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE.

ST. LUKE xiii. 3.—“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” - - - - - 79

SERMON VIII.

THE EFFICACY OF REPENTANCE.

EZEKIEL xviii. 27.—“When the wicked man turneth away from the wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.” - - - - - 91

SERMON IX.

THE FAST DAY.

ISAIAH xxvi. 9.—“ When thy judgments are in the earth,
the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” 104

SERMON X.

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1 COR. vi. 18.—“ Flee fornication.” - - 119

SERMON XI.

ALL ARE ANSWERABLE.

ROMANS xiv. 12.—“ So then every one of us shall give
account of himself to God.” - - - 133

SERMON XII.

ON THE RIGHT HEARING OF THE WORD.

ACTS xxviii. 24.—“ And some believed the things which
were spoken, and some believed not.” - - 146

SERMON XIII.

THE SUDDENNESS OF CHRIST'S COMING.

1 THESSALONIANS v. 2.—“ The day of the Lord so
cometh as a thief in the night.” - - - 159

SERMON XIV.

THE WORKING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND
THE MEANS WHEREBY HE WORKS.

ACTS xix. 2.—“ Have ye received the Holy Ghost since
ye believed ?” - - - 170

SERMON XV.

ON THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

ST. JOHN vi. 67.—“ Jesus said unto the twelve, Will ye also go away ?” - - - - - 184

SERMON XVI.

ON THE HISTORY OF ELI.

1 SAMUEL iii. 11, 12, 13.—“ And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house ; when I begin I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth ; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.”

196

SERMON XVII.

FAREWELL SERMON.

HEBREWS xiii. 17.—“ Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves : for they watch for your souls as they that must give account ; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief.” - - - - - 211

SERMON XVIII.

HARVEST SERMON.

ACTS xiv. 17.—“ Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good. And gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” - - - - - 226

SERMON XIX.

THE USES OF ADVERSITY.

HEB. xii. 11. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby." - - - 238

SERMON XX.

THANKSGIVING DAY.

PSALM xxx. 11, 12.—"Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise unto thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever." - - 249

SERMON XXI.

ALL SAINTS' DAY.

REV. xiv. 13.—"And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

262

SERMON XXII.

THE WIDOW OF NAIN.

ST. LUKE vii. 14, 15.—"And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak." - - - 278

SERMON XXIII.

WHO ARE CHRIST'S ENEMIES?

PHILIPPIANS iii. 18.—“The enemies of the cross of
Christ.” - - - - - 290

SERMON XXIV.

LOT'S WIFE, HER END, AND ITS WARNING.

ST. LUKE xvii. 32.—“Remember Lot's wife.” 303

SERMONS.

SERMON I.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ROMANS xiii. 11.—“ And that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep ; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”

IN these words of St. Paul, we have a warning peculiarly suited to all christian hearers, and more especially at this season of the year. It is a warning against continuing in indifference, in disregard of God, and in a state of sleep and insensibility. And this warning is enforced by an argument drawn from the rapid progress of time, from the quickly diminishing space between time and eternity. It is a warning, my brethren, that I trust may be made of service to us all, and one that I think on farther consideration, will not be found to be unrequired. It is a warning indeed, and something more, for it conveys

a reproach,—“ *Now it is high time,*” is an expression that denotes the necessity of doing something *quickly* ; it is a common manner of saying, “ that there is no time to be lost,” that unless we make haste we shall be too late. And then the call that is made upon us, the duty to which we are summoned, “ to awake out of sleep ;” this surely implies that there is danger if we continue as we are. Whatever that state is, which is described by St. Paul as *sleep*, we may be sure that it cannot be a state of safety, so that putting the two together, the warning in the text may be said to amount to this—that we are in peril, and that unless we use all diligence we shall hardly escape out of it.

I have taken it for granted, that our state before God is such, as for the most part to warrant the necessity of this counsel. Let us see if this be really the case. Let us see whether we are rightly included amongst the number of those, who in scriptural language, are said to be “ asleep,” and if asleep, consequently in peril. On this depends the whole force of the admonition.

And first, what is that sleep here spoken of, as so full of risk to the man who indulges it? It is not, of course, the sleep of the body, but the sleep of the soul. That dullness and deadness to heavenly and spiritual things, to which we are all by nature inclined, and which in more ways than we

are aware of, is always creeping over the hearts of those, who are not continually on the watch against it. It is a sleep which often lies the heaviest on those, who in the exercise of their daily calling, show no lack of activity or vigour. Nay, it is often brought on and increased by this very diligence.

The man of business (as he is called,) is so wholly occupied, that he has no time to care about other matters; sufficient for him is the work that is before him; to this he applies himself with ardour; to buy, and to sell, and get gain, are to him the great things needful. In these transactions he succeeds, and for this reason, because his heart is in his work, because he is awake to what he looks on as his true interest. Talk to such a man about God and the things of another world, it is distasteful to him. And no wonder; the subject, though not new to him, is one on which he has seldom thought—one which at its first approach, appears to condemn him for the very pursuits about which he is so wholly engaged. To condemn him for his over anxiety about this world's goods; for his love of money; for his letting the cares and pleasures of this life, entwine themselves too closely around his heart. Truly I think the state of this man, with respect to his only real interest, can be described no otherwise than as a state of sleep. And how many are there who sleep this sleep! How many are

there, even amiable and excellent in their daily walk of life, honest and upright too in their intercourse with one another, who yet remain in contented indifference as to the real condition of their souls; who have no acquaintance with God, no fellowship with the Spirit of Holiness, no joy in the knowledge of their Redeemer; in short, no pleasure or real comfort in their religion.

And if the man of business may be said to sleep, how much more may the man of pleasure. The man of business is not wholly without excuse: he can plead the necessity of work; he may say that unless he work, he will not have to eat; and to a certain point his work itself, and the zeal with which he sets about it, is to be commended; for it is a religious act, and in doing it, he is doing his duty in that state of life to which God hath called him; his error lies in doing it with an eye singly to his interest in this world, and not with an eye to God's service, and to that world which is to come hereafter.

But the man of pleasure, the man who lives but to gratify every present wish, every foremost desire of the heart, whose time is taken up with devising and enjoying nothing better than amusement, whose aim appears to be to get as much delight as he can out of the few short years of this earthly existence, has not even this cloak for his folly; he cannot say that

his pleasure is his business, that he has nothing given him on this earth to do; for, my brethren, we have all, whatever be our station in life, we have all some work to perform. God never made any man to be idle. He never breathed the breath of an immortal soul into a mortal body only for that body's delight, independent of all higher considerations. No, for His pleasure, not for our own, were we created, and so marvellously made, "That (as the Apostle tells us,) we should live not unto ourselves, but unto God." This is a truth that lies at the surface of all religious knowledge. No man can read his Bible, and not see that a Christian is called upon, in every part of it, to work, to endure, to suffer, and to struggle; but never allowed to indulge in slothfulness and ease. And, therefore, if with such knowledge a man ventures on a life of pleasure, he does it at a fearful risk to his true happiness. He runs hazard of becoming an alien, a stranger to God, of having his eyes sealed up as to the future, so as to be unable to see even a little way into the days that are before him. And when this shall have happened unto him, when this spiritual blindness shall have fallen upon his heart, who will he have to blame but himself and his pursuit of those very vanities which ail experience, no less than all scripture, proves to have an invariable tendency towards so disastrous a result?

Would that all who are tempted to a life of selfish indulgence, would call to mind what has been written for their warning in the Gospel, the fate of Dives the rich man in the parable. He dreamt that this world was the better portion, and so his chief care was to taste of worldly pleasures and worldly happiness to the full ; “ he was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day ;” but when his dream came to an end, when he had slept his sleep, terrible indeed was the awakening,—“ In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.”

Again, there is another class of men, who may be said to sleep even more deeply, more hopelessly, than either of the two kinds of character we have reviewed. These are they who sleep the sleep of sin ; by which I mean all who have allowed themselves so long in wickedness, that their consciences have become seared, and cease to trouble and alarm them. The inveterate drunkard, the open profligate, the habitual liar, are amongst the chief examples of this kind, for they who do such things, in the face of God’s strict sentence of condemnation, must surely be far gone in that dangerous forgetfulness of His almighty power, and perpetual presence, which has been already described as the sleep or numbness of the soul.

In cases like these, (and they are by no means un-

frequent,) lies the main difficulty of a Christian Teacher's office. He sees the danger, and it is his duty to warn those who have incurred it; it is a duty, for neglecting which he must answer to his God. He knows too that unless they be brought out of their peril, they must perish. But then he also from sad experience knows, that the warning will oftentimes be spoken in vain; that it will fall on dead ears, and leave no impression on the heart. Must he then despair? Must the minister of the Gospel give up the attempt altogether, and leave those souls to sink into perdition without an effort to awaken them?

God forbid that he should do this! while there is life there is hope, and, therefore, in spite of former failures, and most unfavourable appearances, still will he continue to sound the cry of alarm, still deliver his message, (the message of the Almighty,) and beseech "the wicked man to turn away from his wickedness," and not die in his sins. Still will he reason with him of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come;" not indeed with the words of man's wisdom, not in reliance on any powers of his own, but in the words that Holy Scripture puts into his lips, and in reliance upon that Spirit of power and of grace, which alone can bring home to the sinner's heart a true sense of his danger, and make him anxious to recover himself out of the

snare of the tempter, and flee in haste from the wrath to come.

To such characters as these, to men who are conscious of having slumbered in the lap of sin, long revelled in drunkenness and sensual practices, (if there be any now present,) let me address the words once addressed to Jonah: "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, and call upon thy God," if so be that God will think upon you that ye perish not. Arise, while yet you may, and go unto your Heavenly Father, whose care and love you have rejected, whose laws you have broken, whose blessed Son you have set at naught by your evil deeds. Go unto Him and say, in all the earnestness of true sorrow, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Make your prayer to God in an acceptable time, while as yet you may be heard, while as yet your condemnation is kept back, while as yet the day of salvation remaineth. But do not venture to delay,—no, not for an instant. If for once the voice of conscience has made itself heard within, be careful not to stifle it, by returning to your old sins. Do not say with the sluggard, "Yet a little more sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," a little more indulgence in our favourite vices, a little longer continuance in folly. No; to do this, is to trifle with God—to put Him off with faint promises of repentance, which we may

never have it in our power to fulfil. Too long have we already provoked Him ; too long already has He been waiting for our return. Awake, then, my brethren, awake to righteousness and sin no more. Awake to-day ; this very hour resolve in your minds not again to enter into temptation, and pray God to keep you stedfast in such resolution. Pray Him, to keep you from evil, to forgive you all that is past, to accept you in the name and for the sake of his beloved Son, and to give you grace that henceforth you may walk before Him in newness of living and truth.

But do I speak these words to those only, whose sins are manifest and open, and not rather to all ? Surely to all. We have all need to awake, and call upon our God more earnestly and heartily, than hitherto we may have done. We have all need, because we have all slumbered and slept. True, that upon some, this sleep has fallen heavier than upon others ; true, that the worldling and the man of pleasure have sunk deeper than others into spiritual insensibility and sloth, and so will have greater difficulty in arousing themselves ; but not less true is it, that upon *all*, without distinction of class or occupation, there is (in a greater or less degree) the like spirit of heaviness, the like inclination, in the busy round of daily cares, to lose sight of heavenly things, and to neglect the interests of the soul.

I do not mean, my brethren, that we forget God as the wicked do altogether, or that we never pray to Him, never study his Holy Word, still less that we are wanting in due attention to the outward observances of religion; on the contrary, I would hope and believe that those who are so regular in their attendance upon God's public worship are not less mindful of Him in the retirement of their families at home: but the question is not so much about the duties themselves, as about the manner and spirit in which they are performed. Have we a real pleasure in them? Are we the better for having practised them? Are our tempers softened and our hopes brightened? Is our love to God increased? Is our charity enlarged? Is our general conduct more and more influenced and harmonized by the lessons of the Gospel that we have so often read and heard? This, my brethren, is the true test of our condition; by this may we know whether we have life in our souls, whether or not we are exempt from the charge of spiritual heaviness. If our conscience acquit us, then, indeed, the warning of the text is not for us. But if it condemn us,—if it be with you, as with myself,—if on impartial searching into our hearts, we are obliged to confess that we have not loved our God, nor obeyed the Gospel of his Son as truly and as devotedly as we ought, that our delight is not al-

ways in Him, that we do not go into his courts with joy, nor fall down before Him to give Him thanks fervently, and out of a full heart, for the many blessings that we have received at His hands,—then can there be no doubt as to the application of the Apostle's words.

It is high time for us to awake out of sleep. It is high time to arouse our faint souls into a quicker and warmer life; to get rid of this lukewarm spirit, and to seek to be renewed in the frame and temper of our minds: it is high time, and delay may be as dangerous to us, as to those who are living more evidently without God in the world; "for," (as the Apostle adds,) "now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

There is much force in these few words, applicable at all times, but more especially now, for this is, as you know, Advent Sunday, and Advent is the beginning of the Christian year; the beginning of that course of beautiful and scriptural instruction, by which our church directs her children's steps from year to year. At such a season we cannot shut out of our minds a sense of the rapid progress, with which our days are passing from us. We cannot but know and feel that we are so much nearer to our latter end—that our trial is shortening—that the evening is coming on. It seems but yesterday that I was speaking to you on this same

subject, and from this same place : so quick, so imperceptibly do we draw towards the grave. We may not, it is true, think much of the difference that a twelvemonth makes in ourselves or in our prospects. Yet, believe me, the difference is not small. Out of a span of three-score years and ten, one twelvemonth is no inconsiderable thing, and such a portion of our time is now and for ever past away. It is past from us and gathered up, and all the good and all the evil, that has been done in it, is registered above, to be brought against us at the great day of account.

This is indeed a grave consideration, and one suggestive of many serious thoughts, which I leave for your own meditation. Enough to observe its bearing upon the subject now before us,—that is, to heighten and enforce the authority of the warning in the text. If life be shorter, and judgment nearer, then are we doubly sure that it is high time to awake out of sleep. In the eloquent language of the Apostle in which he follows up his admonition, “The night is far spent”—the night of this evil world—“the day is at hand”—the day of eternal light. “Let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness,” and let us “put on the armour of light,” “the breastplate of faith and love, and for our helmet the hope of salvation.” “Let us not sleep as do others,” but let us “watch and be sober.”

Above all, let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ; let us study to be conformed as much as may be to His holy likeness. Let us clothe ourselves with His righteousness as with a garment, and as all must who take Him for their example and their rule, "let us not make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof."

Little Hadham, 1846.

SERMON II.

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ROMANS xv. 4.—“ For whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

IN this comprehensive verse, there is matter for much serious meditation: much more than can well be considered in the limits of a single sermon. But as it forms part of the epistle that you have already heard, and is, moreover, intimately connected with the collect for to-day—a collect from its frequent use by the preacher familiar to you all—I am induced to attempt some short explanation of it.

First, then, the Apostle says, “ Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.” That is, all Holy Scripture,—both what we read in the Old and in the New Testament,—was

written for our instruction. It was written under God's direction, and the inspiration of His Holy Spirit.

This is a fact to which allusion is often made by the writers of the epistles. Thus, St. Paul, in this very letter from which my text is taken, speaking of Abraham's justification, after quoting from the book of Genesis what is there said of him, "Abraham believed in the Lord, and it was counted to him for righteousness," remarks, "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him: but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." And in another epistle, (the First to the Corinthians,) after passing in review the privileges granted of old to the Israelites, and their unworthy use of them: after speaking of their ungrateful behaviour toward the High God who had redeemed them from bondage; their idolatry, their fornication, their murmurings, and the punishments which they in consequence brought down upon their guilty heads; the Apostle sums up with this application of their history: "Now all these things happened unto them for examples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

Again, in that well-known passage, in St. Paul's

Second Epistle to Timothy, in which we have, in the compass of two verses, an account of the whole purpose for which the Holy Scripture was given us "All scripture was given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works." From this passage we may gather some notion of the value—the inestimable value—of the Bible. We see how St. Paul regarded it—as the book of God—the book in which He has caused to be set down a record of his dealings with, and purposes towards, mankind; the book wherein we hear the voice of God speaking audibly to men; giving them laws; directing their lives; ordering their conversation; reproofing and punishing their sin; proving their faith; rewarding their obedience; exhibiting in the history of one chosen race, what He requires of all men in order to their true happiness. In short, a book which is able to make us "wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Christ Jesus." Well may we bless God for His goodness in bestowing upon us so rich a treasure. Well and truly does it become us to pray for grace that we may "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it."

And this brings me to another part of our subject: to consider how we may most profitably learn out of God's word; and this is told us in the latter

portion of the text. We are to read and meditate therein ; and for this express end, " that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Through " patience and comfort."—Yes, it is by the exercise of patience, by the experience of comfort, that we shall at length attain to a good hope. In, and by these, we shall possess our souls, and keep ourselves in the love of God.

First, by the exercise of patience. By which I would understand, not only a quiet and uncomplaining bearing under the pressure of calamity—that ready acquiescence to the will of God, which He requires of us all—but farther : the submitting to the reproofs and exhortations of the Bible. It is the taking to ourselves, and applying to our several infirmities, what is there spoken of sin, and of the necessity of being holy. Thus the Holy Scripture saith, " the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God." That if we would obtain salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must not only call Him " Lord, Lord," but take up our cross and follow Him ; follow after Him in the path wherein He walked while in the world ; in lowliness, meekness, piety, purity, and compassionate love for the souls and bodies of our brother men. Again, the Holy Scripture declares, " that if our hand or our eye offend us," we must " cut it off and cast it from us." That is, if we have a besetting sin, (and who

has not?) some vicious inclination that clings to us so closely as to seem part of ourselves; we must get rid of it, root it out, cost the struggle what it may: and for this reason; because unless we do, it will be our ruin—it will destroy both body and soul in hell. So again, the Holy Scripture tells us, that the way to heaven is straight and narrow, and that few there be that find it: very few compared with the vast multitudes who miss the road and wander into the broad and easy road that leadeth to destruction.

These are some of many passages of Holy Scripture (and your own memories can easily suggest others) which at first sight appear hard sayings, and repulsive to our natural feelings. But, my brethren, we know that they are true sayings,—sayings of Him who is “the Truth;” who would never mislead us in a matter of such infinite moment; and therefore we must not shrink from them, but nourish them and cherish them in our hearts, and seek by the help of His grace to bring our lives into agreement with them. For so we shall find in due time, “after we have endured awhile,” that “patience worketh experience, and experience hope.”

The more we become impressed with the teaching of our blessed Redeemer; the stronger the marks which we bear in our body, of that deadness to this world, and its sinful lusts to which we are

summoned in His Gospel, and of which He has set us the example,—the clearer will be the proof of our being alive unto God through Jesus Christ. And then, when this shall be the case, how bright is the prospect which is opened to our view! “To be carnally-minded is death, but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace;” and “if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in us, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in us.”

But farther—the text speaks of the comfort of the Holy Scriptures, as leading together with patience, to the attaining of a good hope. And on this point it will not be necessary to say much, for it is a truth obvious of itself to all. Comfort implies the knowledge of sorrow, and what sorrow is there for which there is not some balm, some healing remedy in the Bible? For instance, is our sorrow caused by some grievous calamity, some great loss which has ruined our earthly prospects? let us search the Scriptures, and we there see it written, that “it is a good thing to be in trouble.” We find David, the man after God’s own heart—the man who of all that ever lived, tasted both of prosperity and adversity to the full,—thus testifying of his own experience: “Before I was troubled I went wrong, but now have I kept

thy word." We find St. Paul declaring that "our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us" (if properly received) "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." We find St. James "counting them happy who endure;" and holding forth for admiration "the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord for an ensample of suffering affliction and of patience."

In short, we find throughout the whole volume of the Bible the witnesses to this great truth: "that sweet are the uses of adversity;" that temporal losses and temporal sufferings are the instruments which in many cases God vouchsafes to use for bringing men unto Himself; for taking their affections off the things of this world, and fixing them upon things above.

Again, is our sorrow that which Death occasions, when he enters our house, and steals away our treasure—some child, or brother, or wife, or sister, or mother, dear to us as our own life; for whom we had gladly died,—for grief like this, deeper than any other,—where shall we go for comfort? Where but to the Bible? There we find that solace which we look for elsewhere in vain. There we are bidden to sorrow not as those who have no hope; for that "if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

Or thirdly, does our sorrow spring from a sense

of sin—from a feeling that we have offended our God, and know not how to approach Him? Are we in a state like that described in the Psalm, “afraid of God’s judgments,” and refusing to be comforted by the usual antidotes which the world applies to a wounded conscience? In circumstances like these, when all else fails, there is sure support and comfort to be met with in the Scriptures. For therein we read of One set for the consolation of Israel,—One who has reconciled us unto God,—One in whose name “forgiveness of sins” is proclaimed,—even the Lord Jesus Christ. If we go unto God, not trusting in our own righteousness, but in the righteousness of his dear Son; earnestly bewailing our offences, pleading His merits for our pardon, and stedfastly purposing henceforth to live by His holy laws, then will the burden be taken off our hearts; our sins, great and grievous as they may have been, will be remitted unto us; we shall have cause to rejoice heartily in the God of our salvation. Only let us not forget that such joy may be taken from us. It can remain only so long as it awakens us to a more religious life: only so long as it constrains us to do from love, what we could not do from fear. God pardons us freely when we repent, and call upon Him in the name of his blessed Son. But He expects that after He “has delivered us from our strong enemy,” we should “serve Him

without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life."

Such then, is the comfort of the Holy Scriptures ; and it is easy to see how this great consolation is connected with the hope of the Gospel. If, from what it tells us, our hearts are comforted under the loss of friends, with the prospect of joining them again, it is clear that there must be another state of existence where that union can be effected ; another and a better country than that in which we now dwell. If, under the agony of sin, we find rest and comfort in the Atonement made by our Lord Jesus Christ upon the Cross ; if we have great joy and peace in believing in Him as our Redeemer and ever present Helper ; it is because there is a place of punishment beyond the grave from which He can rescue us, and a place of happiness to which He can bring us. And is not this preeminently the hope of the holy Scriptures ? " The blessed hope of everlasting life " which " God that cannot lie," hath promised to us, in and through His dear Son. Is not this that on which every sincere Christian leans, as on an " Anchor of the soul sure and stedfast," amidst the tossing and tempest of this troublesome world ? Is not this that which enables him to bear long with, and submit to without repining, all the trials and adversities which assail his course ? Is not this the hope which enabled St. Paul and his fellow

apostles, and many after them," to take joyfully the spoiling of their worldly fortunes; to wear a calm, even joyful face, amidst their infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, which came upon them for their fidelity to their Master's cause—the hope laid up in heaven—the hope of being, in a very little while, with that Lord and Master, never to be separated from Him more?

Yes, my brethren, this is indeed the great hope of our calling. Let us rejoice in it, and hold it firm; so that nothing may move us from it. At the same time let us remember that "he who hath this hope," this blessed hope of being with Christ in His kingdom, must seek "to purify himself even as" the Lord "is pure."

And now to conclude. From what has been said, I think it will be plain, that the purpose of the Almighty in giving us His Holy Scriptures, was to make us "wise unto salvation;" that they were "written for our learning," that we, through the patience and comfort which they afford, "might embrace and ever hold fast the hope of everlasting life." It remains that I should urge upon you the importance of using them so as, by God's grace, to attain such an end.

That you do all possess the Holy Scriptures, I make no doubt. At least it must be your own fault if you do not. It is the boast of this country, that

the Bible is to be seen in the poor man's cottage, as well as in the houses of the rich ; and very thankful should we be that this boast is mainly true. But what if the Bible, though accessible to all, remains to many of us a closed volume ? What if it lie from day to day, from week to week, upon our shelves, or shut up in a drawer, like the talent hid in a napkin ? What if when read, it is *not* marked, *not* learned, *not* inwardly digested, but only looked into for curiosity, or what is worse, as a task, and for a show ? What if it fail to influence our conduct ? What if our passions are not controlled, nor our tempers softened, nor our language improved by what we hear and read in the Bible ? If, in short, we are not better than those who neither know nor possess the Scriptures, then what becomes of our boasting ? Surely it is altogether at an end : rather it is turned to our shame and to our condemnation. " We have Moses and the Prophets ;" the Apostles and Evangelists, and yet we will not hear them. The light is come into the world, and we will not open our hearts to admit its beams. It " shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not."

Let us be careful, my brethren, how we expose ourselves to such a reproach. It is not a little harm that we do against our souls by having, and yet not hearkening to, the Holy Scriptures of God. For

those Scriptures is a pearl of great price; far too rich to be neglected with impunity. They show unto us the way unto salvation; they contain the words of eternal life! O let us then lay this diligently to heart. Let us have recourse to our Bible as to a store-house full of spiritual food—food that we need equally with our daily bread. Let us learn to drink of its fulness as out of a river. Let us go to it as our guide in all cases of perplexity and distress. Let us receive with meekness and with teachable minds its holy lessons. Let us submit ourselves to its sharp rebukes. Let us glean support from its heavenly promises. Let us meditate upon it day and night. So shall we find the worth of that inestimable treasure: so shall we get understanding in the things which concern our everlasting peace. The more we make God's word our study in this the house of our pilgrimage, the more comfort and delight we shall find therein; the more entirely shall we agree with that saying of the Psalmist, "The law of thy mouth is dearer unto me than thousands of gold and silver."

Hartley Wespall,

1847.

SERMON III.

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

ST. MATTHEW xi. 10.—“ For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.”

SUCH is the testimony of our blessed Lord to the character and office of his forerunner. Addressing Himself to the multitudes, who a little time back had flocked to hear the preaching of John by the banks of the river Jordan, He demanded of them the motives by which they had been induced to attend his ministry. “ What went ye out into the wilderness to see ? a reed shaken with the wind ? ” Did you expect to find a man like yourselves, light and vain ; easily carried away by every blast of new doctrine ? “ But what went ye out for to see ? a man clothed in soft raiment ? ” Did you look for an example of worldly ease, a man delicately clad, and self-indulgent, and inviting others to a life of

pleasure? If so, why go out into the wilderness? "Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses." "But what," asks our Lord for the third time, "went ye out for to see?" And then Himself answers the question, "A prophet, yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee."

Now, in these words of our Lord, we have the truest and best account of the Baptist's mission: and as our Church, both in the gospel of to-day, and in that appointed for next Sunday, directs our thoughts to that holy person, it will not, I hope, be an unprofitable employment of our time, if I shortly collect and set before you, what is related in the gospels concerning his office and ministry, with a view to its bearing upon our time and condition.

The parents of John the Baptist were Zechariah and Elizabeth, of whom it is recorded that "they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless." By his mother he was related to Mary the Virgin-mother of our Lord. His birth was announced in a very wonderful manner. The angel Gabriel—the ministering spirit who stands in the presence of God—was sent to Zacharias, while engaged in the duties of his office, with this message

from the Almighty. "Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Zacharias, who was an old man, could not at first receive such exceeding joyful tidings; and for this he was punished with dumbness, until the birth of a son in due time, fulfilled the promise of the angel. The circumstances of his birth, and circumcision on the eighth day, when his father's "tongue was loosed, and he spake and praised God," and prophesied in the loftiest strain of His Redeeming mercy, are, I doubt not, known to you, and are to be found at full in the latter part of the first chapter of St. Luke, which closes with this short and striking account of the early years of the Baptist. "The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his

shewing unto Israel." He "was in the deserts," in silent lonely places, holding communion with God, and daily ripening, under the teaching of His Spirit, for that peculiar work of preparation for the Saviour's approach, for which he had been sent into the world.

To the actual performance of that work, he was called when he was about thirty years of age. We read in the third chapter of St. Luke, (and by comparing what is said there with the third chapter of St. Matthew, we gain all that we require for an understanding of the character and office of John the Baptist,) that "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberias Cesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea, and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." He came and announced himself to be the person in whom was fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough

ways shall be made smooth ; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Such was his cry, and it was borne out by his appearance. For " the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins, and his meat was locusts and wild honey : " that is, he gave evident tokens by his austere and hardy mode of life, that he was no ordinary person, but one like the prophets of the Old Testament, sent to be witness for God in the midst of an unbelieving world ; sent to warn men of the necessity of repenting and turning to God with humility and contrition of heart. He reproached the Jews with their wickedness ; he called upon them to confess and forsake their sins, and to be baptized with water, as a mark that they truly desired to be cleansed from their pollution.

To enforce his teaching, he proclaimed the approach of a new era in the world. He testified of the immediate coming of the long expected Messiah. He declared that the Lord God was about to establish in the earth, that holy and spiritual kingdom which had been so often foretold by the prophets : a kingdom of righteousness, equity, and truth ; a kingdom out of which were to be cast all that offend, and into which none could hope to be admitted who did not eschew evil, and seek after holiness. He bid them " repent, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand."

Nor was his preaching in vain. Moved by fear, or touched by conscience, multitudes went out to him, from "Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan," and were "baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." But when he saw among the crowds, "many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism;" men, who from their self-righteousness, and hardened worldly-mindedness, were the last he could have looked for as converts to his doctrine; he addressed them in words of sharp rebuke, "O generation of vipers, (seed of the evil one who deceived Eve,) who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" At the same time he exhorted them to make good their profession of amendment: "bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." Think not, (we may interpret it,) that the boast of being Abraham's children, and heirs to the promises made to him by God of old, will be of any service, unless it is made good by a life and conversation answerable to that of Abraham. Think not in the new reign of which I am the herald, that any specious show of piety will be allowed to cover the absence of real godliness; that words will be accepted instead of deeds. "For now also the axe is laid to the root

of the trees : therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

That such awful language produced a great effect upon the multitudes, is plain by the question which they put to him, " What shall we do then ?" that is, in order to be saved. To which the Baptist replied, speaking generally, " He that hath two coats let him impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." While to others he gave more particular directions, suitable to their peculiar circumstances, saying to the publicans or tax-gatherers, " Exact no more than that which is appointed you," and to the soldiers, " Do violence to no man, neither accuse any one falsely ; and be content with your wages."

After this, when the wisdom of his words had created a feeling that he was himself the great Person of whom he had spoken, while many " mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not ;" this holy but humble-minded man at once protested against the notion, and added to what had gone before, a farther mark by which they should know the true Messiah : " I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire ; whose fan is in his hand, and

he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into the garner : but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Such, then, by his own showing, was the office of John the Baptist. Without carrying the inquiry any farther into his life, we may learn thus much respecting him. He was a man sent from God, divinely commissioned to prepare the way for the reception of Jesus Christ; to make ready a people for the Lord. He came charged with a message to the Jews; a message which concerned their salvation; a message respecting what they must do, who looked for redemption in Israel. And that was this; repent and be baptized, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. He came to assure them, that Christ was at hand; and to teach them the qualifications required of all those who would be His disciples: humility, self-abasement, honesty, temperance, contentment, pureness of living and truth.

And now, my brethren, what is the application of the Baptist's history to ourselves? Surely it was this. John, the forerunner and messenger of Jesus Christ, represents in many points the office of all succeeding ministers of the Gospel. Like his, our part is to prepare the way of the Lord. We too, have a commission from God. That is to say, we do not of ourselves venture to assume so arduous an office. We are sent by authority to do the work

of the ministry ; like St. John, we are messengers of the Lord. We are charged with tidings of great joy ; we have to make known the way of salvation. We have to make it known and bring it home to the hearts and understandings of our people : neither adding to it, nor diminishing from it ; neither making it harder, nor less difficult than it really is ; but setting it before you, even as we find it in the Gospel, as “ the way of God in truth.”

And how shall we fulfil our office ? How (under the help of the Holy Spirit) shall we approve ourselves faithful to Him who hath sent us, better than by taking pattern by what is written of John the Baptist ; by preaching as he did, the absolute necessity of repentance ; by warning you as he did the Jews, not to misunderstand or abuse the position in which by the mercy of God you have been placed : by representing ever and afresh, that the mere fact of our being baptized into God’s church, and made His sons by adoption, (though absolutely necessary at the beginning,) is not in itself sufficient : that with the name, we must put on the character of a Christian ; by reminding you continually that ours is a holy and undefiled religion,—that a hollow faith, or hypocritical practice, however it may deceive the world, yes, and our own hearts, cannot deceive Him who seeth in secret, and requireth truth in the inward parts ; that in the end, all such pretence will

be unveiled ; that a day is coming, a day of righteous revelation, when the darkest and most hidden corner of our hearts will be brought to light ; and our lives, and conversation, and motives, and every thought, tried in an impartial balance ; a day when the Lord in whom we believe, shall come out of His place for judgment,—come, as is written of Him by the prophet Malachi, as a “ swift witness ” against all who hold the truth in unrighteousness, “ against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against the false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and that fear not the Lord of Hosts.”

Such, I think, is the method which a minister of Christ will feel bound to pursue in dealing with the Gospel message ; and hence is it that you so often hear us reasoning “ of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come.”

But this is not all. The Baptist, as we have seen, spoke of One mightier than himself ; One who should baptize not only with water unto repentance, but with the Holy Ghost and with fire. And so too must we speak, else our words will profit you but little. While we tell you, as in duty bound, that holiness is necessary to salvation,—that none can expect to “ ascend into the hill of the Lord,” and to rise up in His holy place, but such as lead an un-

corrupt life—we must not forget to inform you how such a life is possible; how, with our sinful and corrupt nature, we may arrive at temperance, and purity, and godliness. We must, in short, lead you to Christ; lead you in conscious weakness to repose on His strength; lead you to have recourse to Him for all things necessary to life and godliness; for wisdom, for righteousness, for sanctification, for redemption.

Hence, my brethren, it comes to pass, that together with such exhortation as I have above described, you hear us inviting you to diligent use of all the means of grace; speaking often of the efficacy of prayer; pressing upon you the duty of public worship; and the importance of receiving the Lord's Supper. And for this reason, because these are the channels through which the Holy Spirit of God and of His Christ, works effectually in the heart of every true believer; moulding it, and shaping it after the good pleasure of His will; contradicting its evil inclinations, rooting out its deadly wickedness, and filling it with His own fruits, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, brotherly kindness, charity."

It may be said that the subject we have been considering more concerns the minister than the congregation before whom he serves; that the history of John the Baptist as traced in the Gospel, is written for our learning rather than for yours. But,

my brethren, do not suppose that it is not therefore useful to you also. Though pointing more directly to our office, it has reference to your duties as well. We, as duly appointed ministers of the church of Christ, may well consider that our's truly is a responsible position ; seeing that we are messengers of the Lord, sent to prepare His way before Him. And great need have we to labour and pray that we be not found wanting in it.

But when our message is once delivered, the responsibility is then thrown upon the hearers. It is for them to receive it or to reject it. "He that heareth, let him hear, and he that forbeareth, let him forbear." Therefore, my brethren, let me press upon you the necessity of diligent attention to the message that we deliver. Do not look upon it as a matter in which you have no interest, but as something that concerns you very nearly. "The words that we speak, we speak not of ourselves, but as they are given to us of God;" words, we trust, of truth and soberness ; words which, by God's grace carrying them home, are able to build you up, and give you an inheritance amongst them that are sanctified.

Put yourselves therefore within the reach of receiving our message ; omit no opportunity of hearing the word preached from those who have authority to

deliver it. But do not let this be all. "Be doers of God's word, and not hearers only," else that word will avail you nothing. Nay, instead of profiting, it will only serve to condemn you. The truths which you hear out of Holy Scripture to do you good, must stay by you, and work in you like leaven, till the whole character is leavened ; till you become like-minded with your Lord, "nourished up," (to use the forcible expression of St. Paul in the fourth chapter of his first Epistle to Timothy,) "in the words of faith and of good doctrine," "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

This happy effect can indeed only be looked for after a long time, and when produced is to be ascribed to the influence of the Holy Spirit, and that influence is, as you know, to be sought for in prayer. Pray then, and that earnestly, that He may rest upon you ; that so the words spoken to you in this holy place, be not spoken in vain.

And for all who speak it, pray as well : for your own, and for all ministers and stewards of God's mysteries. Pray, my brethren, in the spirit of that beautiful collect which the Church puts into our mouth to-day ; that like as John the Baptist did fulfil his ministry, and prepared the way for the first coming of the Redeemer, so we in like manner may in our day, make ready His way, by "turning

the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at his second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in his sight, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God world without end."

SERMON IV.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 3.—“The Lord is at hand.”

THE Collect for the First Sunday in Advent, is, as you may have observed, appointed to be repeated with the other Collects every day till Christmas Eve. And for this reason, because it is framed with a view of turning our thoughts to such subjects as may most profitably occupy our minds at this season of the year ; even to the first coming of our blessed Lord in the flesh, and to His second coming to judge the world at the last.

Nor is it through this Collect alone, that our church directs us to the contemplation of these most important truths ; but in all the Collects, and generally in all parts of the service selected for the four

weeks in Advent ; those of you, my brethren, who have attended at all seriously to the portions of Holy Scripture which have been read at church during the last three weeks, must, I am sure, have been struck with the manner in which these two great facts,—the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His return to judgment, (truths between which all the other doctrines of our holy religion find their place,) are held up to our minds ; held up in connexion one with the other ; held up for this purpose, that we might never separate the two ideas ; but that when, as at this time, we are looking forward to the day of our Saviour's birth, as a day of joy and gladness, we should extend our view to that which is closely connected with it, namely, the second appearance of our Lord from heaven.

Indeed, inasmuch as this is in some sort, the more important truth of the two,—for the first coming of our Lord, that by which we obtain pardon of our sins, and reconciliation with our Almighty Father, has already taken place, and the effect of it has long been working in the world, while the second coming is yet for to be ;—on this account the greater stress appears to be placed upon it by our church at this season. To it, rather than to the first coming, is our attention called. Witness those magnificent descriptions of the Lord's power and majesty to be displayed in the day of judgment,

which are contained in the chapters of the prophet Isaiah, appointed for these Sundays. Thus, in the second chapter, (that selected for the afternoon lesson on the First Sunday in Advent,) where it is declared that "in the last days, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow into it." "Enter into the rock and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty." "The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of man shall be made low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." And farther on the prophet speaks of men "throwing away their idols of silver, and their idols of gold," the pleasures and riches in which they trusted, as of no use to save them in that day of their extreme need; throwing them away "to the moles, and to the bats;" and going "into the clefts of the rocks, and into the top of the ragged rocks; for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his Majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth."

The afternoon lesson for the Second Sunday in Advent, also contains a description of the day of judgment, with a more particular enumeration of its effect upon the world and its wicked inhabitants. "Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth." "The earth

is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage, and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again." "Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, and before his ancients, gloriously."

Nor is this all. Besides such forcible pictures of the things that are to be hereafter given us in the prophecies of Isaiah; the epistles and gospels for these Sundays in Advent, all unite for the same purpose; all conspire to awake "in our hearts a sense of the reality and certainty of Christ's second coming, and of the nearness of its approach. What else do such exhortations as these signify, which we read in the epistle for the First Sunday in Advent? "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light?" What else is the spiritual meaning of that account of our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, in the gospel of the same Sunday, when He, the humble one of Nazareth, was saluted as coming "in the name of the Lord?" What else is the meaning of the collect for

last Sunday, and the call which it makes to all ministers of Christ's gospel to prepare His way before Him, as John the Baptist did at His first appearing ? And lastly, what but the day of judgment is intended in that announcement of St. Paul, taken from the Epistle of to-day, "The Lord is at hand ?"

I have dwelt thus long upon the various parts of the service appointed for this present season, because I consider the matter they contain, to be of all things most profitable for our learning, most calculated to create in our hearts feelings and affections suited to our christian profession ; and more especially so at this solemn time. What they teach us are principally these two truths. First, that the Lord Jesus Christ, Who as at this time was born into the world, and made man for us, but Who is now at the right hand of the Majesty on high, will return again once more at the end of the world, to judge the living and the dead. Farther, they teach us, that His coming is not distant ; that "the day of the Lord is at hand."

Of these two points it is to the second that I would chiefly call your attention, for the first admits of no question. It is a truth revealed, not only by the prophets of the Old Testament, but by the mouth of the Lord Himself. "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Yes,

my brethren, and we and all,—the most careless as well as the most religious, agree in receiving this truth. There is no one present here, who does not at least with his lips profess to believe, that Jesus Christ, Who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, for our sins, and for our salvation, will come again to be the Judge of quick and dead.

But on the second point, upon the fact announced in the text, of the nearness of Christ's coming, there is more difference of opinion. From one cause or another ; from weakness, or from want of faith, or from too closely minding of earthly things, our hearts grow cold, and will not readily consider how near may be the approach of the Lord's day.

This has been from the beginning a cause of reproach to the Church of Christ. There have always been, as St. Peter prophesied there would be, "men walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming, for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were?" And indeed here we may find the true cause of our indifference ; because "things continue as they were;" because we see no immediate sign of the end of the world, we are satisfied it will not be yet. It were well that we should bear in mind the continuation of St. Peter's words in that same third chapter of his second epistle. "But,

beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

This, if reflected on, will put a stop to all vain questioning respecting the fulfilment of Christ's promise. A thousand years in the sight of the Almighty are but as yesterday, seeing that is past as a watch in the night. The time that was already gone by since the first coming of our Lord, and the time that has yet to transpire ere He returns, is absolutely insignificant; a mere speck, a single moment in comparison with that age which never has an end, which we call eternity; and into which, for good or for evil, our lot must be cast. When time shall be no more, eternity will be fresh and young; and so shall they be, who are the inhabitants of eternity; so shall we be, every one of us, in that future world, towards which we are daily drawing nigh. We shall never grow old, nor die any more. Being raised up by the operation of God out of our graves, we shall put on incorruption, and so be fitted for what at present we can but feebly conceive, either for everlasting happiness or for everlasting woe.

If this be so; if, in comparison with the future, the present is as nothing; if our years at the most are but a span long; if, out of that allotted span, by far the greater portion of mankind attain not to

its limit ; if death be, as we all allow, for any purpose of change, the same with the day of judgment : then is not the language of St. Paul most strictly true, " that the day of the Lord is at hand ? " It may be, that for some of us the Judge standeth immediately at the door. Certain it is that there can be no contradiction to this revealed truth ; no denial of Himself. If He delay, it is because " He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great pity." It is because He knows that we are not ready. " The Lord," writes the same Apostle quoted before, " is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

And now, my brethren, let us shortly collect the practical instruction to be derived from the subject we have been considering. If, as I trust has been clearly proved to you, " the Lord is at hand," what should be our conduct now ? What manner of men ought we to be, who look for the revelation of the Lord from heaven ? Surely we ought to be about our Master's business, lest, coming suddenly, He find us sleeping, This, I think, is the first and most evident conclusion to be drawn,—the necessity of occupying ourselves with our Lord's work, till He come.

And what, you will perhaps ask, is the Lord's

work? What is the business He has given us to do? We need not be at a loss to discover this. It lies close at hand, and is immediately before us. It is our every day task and duty; no matter how humble in itself that task may be. Be it labour in the field, or service in the house; be it work of mind or body, it comes to us by God's appointment, and in it we may serve Him as acceptably as in the highest office of power,—we may serve Him by doing our work heartily and faithfully,—by doing it in a religious spirit, in the faith and fear of God,—by doing it, not because we are watched by our employer, not because, if negligent, we shall suffer loss,—but because we have a Master in heaven, a Master whose eyes are always over us; One who has respect unto the faithful, but will by no means spare the guilty.

Admirable is the advice which St. Paul gives us on this point: advice which puts before us in the clearest way how we may work the work of the Lord, without going one step beyond our allotted stations. “Servants,” says he, in the sixth chapter of his Epistle to the Ephesians, “be subject to them that are your masters according to the flesh;” “not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that whatsoever good

things any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And ye, masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven, neither is there any respect of persons with Him."

Once more, if "the Lord is at hand;" we ought surely to be on the look out for His approach. And this is the second inference I would have you draw from the knowledge of this solemn truth,—namely, the importance of watchfulness, of living as those men described in the parable, "with our loins girded, and our lights burning," and ourselves like men "who wait for their Lord, that when He cometh and knocketh, we may open to Him immediately."

This indeed is one of those cautions of Holy Scripture with which no one is unacquainted; one which is very often on the lips of a minister of the Gospel. And is there not a cause for this? Does not our Lord repeat it again and again? "Watch therefore," are His words in St. Matthew, "for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." And again, "Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh." "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." "What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch."

And why did He thus? Why did our blessed Redeemer, who Himself warned us not to use vain repetitions; why did He so frequently urge this same caution? Why, but because He knew what was in man. He knew how frail we are, and of ourselves disinclined to vigilance: willing, if we might, to have our portion in this life, and unwilling to consider our latter end. He knew, too, the consequence of our indulging in such an indolent and earthly spirit. That it would bring on the state of dull insensibility to religious impressions, out of which to awake would be impossible; awake at least in time to mind the things that concern our peace. And so, as we have seen, He bade us watch, not once or twice, but many times, speaking the same words.

Be it our care not to neglect so often repeated, and earnest a charge. Let us watch and be sober. In the midst of our busiest days let the future often be in our minds. Let us familiarize ourselves to think of death; of its certainty; of its nearness. And let us strive to live so that we may not be afraid to die; that the summons to depart, whether it come in the first, in the second, or in the third watch,—in the morning of our days, or in the prime of manhood, or in the decline of old age,—may not be unwelcome.

For this end, let us keep our hearts fixed upon

things above : let us count that our home is where our Saviour Christ is gone before. Let us look for His return from thence, not as an evil, but as a good ; as the happiest thing that can befall us, if so be that our faith is sound : as the time when He will come to fetch us to Himself, “to gather His elect from the four winds, from every quarter under heaven.”

That time can in no wise be long. “ Yet a little while, and He that cometh will come, and will not tarry.” Blessed are they who in that awful moment shall be found expecting him. Great shall be the recompense of their reward. To them belong the prophet’s triumphant words, “ Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us,—this is the Lord, we have waited for Him : we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

Hartley Wespall, 1847.

SERMON V.

THE BARREN FIG-TREE MAY NOT STAND.

ST. LUKE xiii. 6.—“A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.”

THE parable of the barren fig-tree, is one of those portions of our blessed Redeemer's teaching with which no reader of the Gospel can be unacquainted. Neither can any one be at a loss to understand its meaning. It speaks at once to the heart and to the conscience. It proclaims clearly and distinctly these solemn truths; truths abundantly confirmed by the tenor of the whole scriptures; that God will not be satisfied with a profession of religion without the power of it; that He looks for fruit from His creatures; that the nominal Christian will not be able to stand in the day of His visitation.

These are truths which have at all times a claim

upon our attention ; but at no time more so than at the present, when we are entering upon the beginning of a new year ; when the line has been crossed which divides one period of our short existence from another ; when we are, as it were, once again at the starting point of a fresh course ; when nothing remains of the past twelvemonth, except the memory of what it brought us ; the recollection of the blessings and mercies, the warnings and chastisements which we have experienced in it, and which, it may be, we have neglected to improve. Surely, my brethren, at such a season, it is right fit, and our bounden duty to take thought both for what is past, and for what is yet to come ; to stand still and commune with ourselves ; to review in our minds our actual condition in the sight of God ; to judge ourselves that we be not judged of Him ; to look well if there be in us any signs of our bearing fruit, such as He will regard ; and if not, what is the hindrance to our so doing ; what way of wickedness has enticed us astray from God ; what is it that exposes us to the reproach of being barren and unprofitable trees in His vineyard.

To assist in promoting such serious and wholesome reflections, I have chosen for our consideration the parable of which the text forms a part. This, if rightly explained, will, I trust, have a beneficial effect upon us all ; and help, by God's blessing,

to produce in us, the fruit of a truly religious, truly christian life.

Now the parable is this :—“ A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard ; and he came and sought fruit thereon and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years, I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree and find none : cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground ?” And he answering, said unto him, “ Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it ; and if it bear fruit, well ; and if not, after that thou shalt cut it down.”

Now the first application of this parable has manifestly reference to the Jews ; they were of old, in a remarkable degree, the favoured people of the Almighty ; they were the vine brought out of Egypt, and planted in the fruitful soil of Canaan ; they had everything given them to make them grow up, as an holy people to the Lord :—Their’s was “ the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises :” but alas ! all was in vain ; they yielded no return answerable to the care which had been bestowed upon them. “ God looked that they should bring forth grapes, and behold they brought forth wild grapes.” He looked “ for judgment, but behold a cry ; for righteousness, but behold oppression ;” and what was their end ? Their end,

as their history shows us, was that they were rooted out. God, after sparing them for many hundred years, after waiting long for their amendment, at length ceased to watch over them, left them a prey to their enemies, and finally dispossessed them of their inheritance.

But while the parable presents us in the first instance with a picture of God's dealing with the Israelites, this is not the only application that may be made of its teaching: looked at from another point of view; it concerns ourselves, and in this light let us go on to consider it.

The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is now the christian church. Every member of that church, every one who by baptism has been incorporated into the number of Christ's people, is a fig-tree planted in the vineyard: he is taken out of a state of wrath and placed in a state of grace; he is chosen out of the world lying in wickedness, and put within the shelter of God's fold: within that fold or church he has everything given him to secure his happiness, to make his calling and election sure: the pure word of God as written in the bible: an appointed ministry whose office it is to teach and to premonish, to warn and to instruct him out of the same: the Holy Sacraments of the Gospel: a devout form of prayer, and order of worship: Sabbath days for attending upon that service: in

short, all God's ordinances and means of grace ; all are freely offered him in order that he might " grow thereby," grow up and yield fruit, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

And what, you will ask, is that fruit—the fruit which the Lord looks for from all who, as we, have been made partakers in the privileges of the Christian covenant ? My brethren, it is the fruit of faith, the fruit which is wrought in the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit ; which is not of one kind alone, but of many, which produces all these goodly sorts ;—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance, " all these worketh that one, and the self-same spirit ;" by these will a true Christian ever be known in the sight of God, just as a good tree is known by its good fruit. If this be so, the question for us now to consider, (and I know of none more important,) is, whether we have these fruits in ourselves. It is a question that each must ask of himself :—am I gentle ? am I forbearing ? am I meek ? am I temperate ? am I kind and considerate to those around me ? have I great joy and peace in believing ? does my joy appear in this, in the pleasure that I find in the exercise of my religious duties ? is the sabbath my delight ? do I honour it and keep it holy, by coming whenever it returns, into the courts of God's house ? do I honour it at home by using the

leisure which it brings me for reading and meditating the Scriptures? do I pray to God and praise Him, not only on His Sabbath, but always, at all times, day by day continually? I will not anticipate the answer to these inquiries. I fear, however, that in many instances, that answer, if impartially made, would not be favourable: I fear that were we to look back only for a little space into our lives; only over our conduct during the last year, in order to see what progress we have made in real godliness; what fruit the profession of our faith is yielding: were it possible for us to recall to mind all that has been committed by us between now and January last; the false and profane words we have spoken; the base and uncharitable, and jealous thoughts we have conceived; the out-breaks of temper in which we have indulged; the hours and days we have thrown away that might have been more profitably spent; the opportunities of improvement we have neglected; all that we have done amiss, and all that we have left undone: I fear, my brethren, that in such a case, so far from asserting that the fruits of righteousness have been growing in us, we should have to confess with shame our unprofitableness; we should feel that the words of the parable which represent the Almighty as looking in vain for fruit in His vineyard, are truly

applicable to our own state,—“ He came and sought fruit thereon and found none.”

These are indeed piercing words, words that indicate a condition of danger ; how great that danger is, we may learn from the verse which follows : “ Then said he to the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree and find none : cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground ? ”

In this awful language we have most plainly described the purposes and dealings of the Almighty towards His creatures ; towards us, and towards all men, as many as have been engrafted into his church : Behold, these three years He comes seeking fruit.

It is no fanciful interpretation, my brethren, which would make these words represent the three several stages of our human life ; youth, manhood, and old age. During all this time God comes to us seeking fruit.

He comes to us in our childhood, and looks for fruit of our baptismal grace. He looks for gentle tempers, and submissive wills : He looks to see us, even as was His own Holy Child Jesus, in the house of Joseph and Mary, dutiful to our parents, loving and amiable to one another, innocent in our conversation, giving promise of a godly and Christian life. Again, He maketh inquisition of us in manhood ; and then, God looks for the fulfilment of our

early promise; for fixed religious principles; for consistent religious conduct; for hearts rooted and grounded in the faith; stedfastly set to fulfil his commandments; bent to carry out and practise in every transaction of life, this summary of the divine law,—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.” Thirdly, God comes to us in old age, still looking for fruit, the fruit of a well spent life; of a mind of peace within itself, and at peace with Him; and therefore rejoicing in the hope of a blessed eternity: content, if He will, to tarry yet awhile; ready, at His summons, to depart on the morrow. But what if God look in vain? What if He find in us no fruit answerable to his just expectation? What if in His sight we present a barren and lifeless appearance? If He find us in childhood wilful and unruly, in middle age worldly-minded and averse to religion, in the evening of our days, covetous and complaining, more careful to prolong our time in this world, than to attend to the interests, and make preparation for the world that is to come—what, in such circumstances, must be the consequence? Must we not fear that our state is one of great alarm; that we are they against whom the sentence of condemnation has been pronounced; “Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?”

In strict justice we should have no right to murmur were such actually to be our doom. *The barren fig-tree* (as is emphatically said at the heading of the Chapter in which the parable occurs) *may not stand*. It may not stand, neither in the natural nor spiritual world.

Your own experience, my brethren, should convince you of this. Which of you that had a fig-tree or an apple-tree, or any other fruit-bearing tree in his garden that produced him nothing, would care to let it remain? Would you year by year go seeking fruit on it, and year by year be disappointed and find none? Would you see it occupying the good soil, drawing away its strength and nourishment from other plants; mocking you perhaps with abundance of bloom, and with a fair show of leaves, and yet take no steps to remove it? No, you would surely after bearing with it for awhile, lay the axe to its root; you would cut it down, because it cumbered the ground.

And might not God deal with us after the like manner, as many as are barren and unprofitable before Him? Might He not cut us off in the midst of our negligence and ignorance? No one will dispute His right to do this. The reason why He does it not, the reason why God graciously spares us, is yet to be considered. And this is told us in the sequel of the parable.

When the owner of the vineyard expressed his disappointment to the dresser of it, and his intention of rooting out the useless fig-tree, he met with this reply :—"Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it ; and if it bear fruit, well ; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

We have here given us a lively image of one part of our great Redeemer's office ; that of Advocate, and Intercessor of his church. It is the Lord's Christ, who is pictured to us under the figure of a vine dresser : It is His voice, the voice of mercy, which is heard pleading on our behalf with the Almighty. "Let it alone this year also." Let it alone till some further efforts shall have been made to remedy its barrenness ; "till I shall dig about it and dung it."

I shall not pause to inquire what are the exact means intended by these words. We are sure they are such as would be best calculated to effect the purpose of our gracious Intercessor : perhaps some sharp discipline of affliction ; something which should strike at the very root of our disease ; some loosening of the worldly cares, and worldly pleasures which cling so closely to our hearts ; which choke the word and make it unfruitful. Be they what they may, the lesson which our Lord's answer conveys, is full of meaning. That meaning is,—That

we who are alive at this day, are alive for this end, That we might yield fruit unto God; That we might yet escape the awful punishment pronounced against the barren Christian: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away."

Lay this to heart, my brethren, and reflect upon it. Consider why it is that you and I and those with whom we live are still in the midst of life; still in the enjoyment, more or less complete, of our health and reason, our faculties of mind and body: why is it that while during the last year death has been so busy in these kingdoms, while thousands upon thousands have been swept away by the famine and the pestilence; while within the last six months, in this single village the bell has tolled for the infant of days, and for the young man in his strength, we who are older, and many of us more feeble, have yet been spared? Why—but because the Lord who seeth before and after, knoweth that we are not ripe for the harvest; knoweth that howsoever it may be with others, it could not be good for us to die. It is, I would believe, on this account, that the cry of our merciful Saviour still rises on our behalf before the throne; still pleads for a longer trial: "Let it alone this year also."

If this be true, how careful should we be to redeem the time: how anxious to make the most of the year of grace thus mercifully granted us: how

diligent in availing ourselves of every aid for growing in wisdom : how determined to eschew evil, and do good ; to forsake sin and follow after holiness ! For observe, my brethren, there is a limit even to the compassionate tenderness of our Redeemer : Christ Himself does not ask for more than a *respite* for us. He does not pray the Father to excuse our unprofitableness altogether : to give us license to live on still in sin and indifference. No ;—that would be to contradict His own ministry. All He desires is, (and His desire is strictly at one with the will of His Father,) that we should have time for repentance ; that we should not be dealt with after our sins at once ; not till every opportunity had been offered, every endeavour made to win us to amendment. But when the opportunities *have* been given, when the endeavour *has* been made, when warning and chastisement, mercies and providences, *have* been all tried, and we continue unchanged for the better ; still in love with our evil courses, still unwilling to break off from the “ old man which is corrupt,” and to “ put on the new man which after God is renewed in righteousness and true holiness ;” still like trees “ whose fruit withereth, twice dead ;” then the intercession of the Saviour ceases : then no longer is there any impediment in the way of justice ; any bar to the completion of the awful sentence already issued against us : they are the Lord’s own words,

.

“ If it bear fruit, well ; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.” Such is the parable of the barren fig-tree : and the application of it to our own condition has already been made. I will only, in conclusion, shortly repeat the chief lessons which it teaches us, namely these :—

I. What I alluded to at the beginning, that the barren fig-tree cannot remain in God’s vineyard ; that God expects from every Christian,—every one who “ has a name to live,”—the fruit of a Christian life.

II. That on this account He waits long and is kind ; does not cut us off in the midst of our sins ; spares us when we deserve punishment, and in His wrath thinketh upon mercy.

And lastly, That even the patient forbearance of our Heavenly Father may be wearied out : that the time will come when He will “ lop the bough with terror” on which no fruit can be found : that for those who persist in opposing His will ; who in spite of better knowledge, and abundant opportunities, continue unfruitful, “ dead in trespasses and sins,” there remaineth a certain fearful expectation of judgment : that the end of the ungodly,—and by the ungodly I would understand not the absolutely vicious, but all who are not godly, all who are living for themselves, and not unto God—the end of such is that they shall “ be rooted out at the last.” “ The earth,” writes the

apostle in the epistle to the Hebrews, "which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God : but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned."

These, my brethren, are all solemn and certain truths of Holy Scripture. May God bless them to our improvement. May He touch our hearts with such a deep sense of the mercies many and great that we have received at His hands,—and this, not the least, that we are alive at the present hour,—as shall stir us up to serve Him henceforth more sincerely, with our hearts as well as with our lips. May the year which through His mercy is now opening upon us, be to us all, the commencement of a stricter and more willing obedience than as yet we have rendered to the laws and precepts of the Gospel, and to all the ordinances of our holy religion ; so that at the close of it, if He will that we remain till then, we may appear no more barren and unfruitful, but rather show like that tree described in the first Psalm, "as planted by the water side ; that bringeth forth his fruit in his season," and whose leaf doth not wither ; bearing fruit like it, fruit which, as the product of His Holy Spirit, shall redound to God's Glory, and to our salvation through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hartley Wespall, Jan. 2, 1848.

SERMON VI.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

GENESIS xv. 6.—“ And he believed in the Lord ; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

THE great person to whom these words refer, was the patriarch Abraham ; the illustrious ancestor of the Israelites, of whom we hear so much in the book of Genesis ; the Father of the Faithful, and the Friend of God. His indeed is a character, the study of which must at all times afford us benefit and instruction ; but it seems peculiarly forced upon our attention at present by the selection of the first lessons at this season of the year. (Quinquagesima Sunday.) Let me, then, invite you, my brethren, to follow me while I attempt to set forth for our admiration and humble imitation, some of the most prominent points in the history of this holy man : es-

pecially such points as serve best to exhibit and illustrate the truth of what is said of him in the text, that unshaken reliance upon God's promises which obtained for him so large a blessing ; the faith which was counted to him for righteousness.

Now, the first notice we have of Abraham in the Scripture, is given at the end of the eleventh, and beginning of the twelfth chapter of Genesis ; from whence we learn that while living with his father Terah, in the Land of Mesopotamia, he received a call from God to quit his kindred, and his country, and go in search of a new land which God would show him. That new land was Canaan, the future home of the Jewish people ; a land lying at a vast distance from the place where Abraham dwelt ; a land at that time inhabited by fierce and warlike tribes, jealous of their own rights, and inaccessible to strangers ; besides which, the country that lay between Mesopotamia and Canaan was wild, and barren, without roads or any means of support for travellers. But these discouraging obstacles had no weight in Abraham's breast against the direct bidding of the Almighty. " He believed in God ;" he believed that the Lord who had called him would also keep him alive, and conduct him in safety to his destined habitation. And so at once and without hesitation he obeyed ; he went out, as St. Paul tells us in simple and affecting language,—“ he went

out, not knowing whither he went." The first halt that he made on his long journey was at Charran or Haran, and there, till the death of his aged father, he remained long enough to have formed a liking for the spot; long enough to have made further wandering irksome to him; for he was now, as we read at the fourth verse of the twelfth chapter, seventy-five years old. But his faith, as before, would not suffer him to rest while as yet God's purpose towards him was unfulfilled. So he removed in his old age from Haran, with "Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance and all that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came."

But here another trial was prepared for faithful Abraham. The Almighty, when He called him at the first, had promised to make of him a great nation: a nation in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed;—a promise which admits of a two-fold interpretation, and which has since been, in a great measure, fulfilled. But how little prospect was there of its accomplishment, when Abraham, after his long journeyings, first entered into Canaan. Instead of possessing the land for an inheritance, he had not so much as a foot's breadth that he could call his own. He was a stranger and among strangers; obliged to be continually on the move either

for security or for subsistence: dwelling on that account, not in any fixed abode, but in tabernacles or tents, which to-day might be pitched in one spot, and to-morrow carried to another. Yes, and as if to preclude all prospect of his increasing in strength, the circumstances of his situation were such as to render it necessary for Lot, his kinsman, with all his family and servants, to separate themselves from Abraham, and go to live in another district of the land. Add to this, Sarai, Abraham's wife, was barren, and they had both come to an age when the hope of having children must have been altogether extinguished.

What then, you will ask, was it that kept Abraham firm in his reliance upon God, under circumstances so depressing? It was, in a word, his faith; the faith which first brought him out from his father's home, and which now sustained him against despair. Nor was he without comfort from God. The word of the Lord came to him with this assurance,—“that all the land in which he now sojourned should be given to him and to his seed for ever;” it was an assurance mercifully repeated, and continually enlarged in proportion as the probability of its accomplishment seemed more remote. Thus at his first entrance into Canaan the Lord appeared to Abraham and said, “Unto thy seed will I give this land.” Again, after his separation from Lot,

the promise was renewed in these striking words,—
“ Lift up thine eyes and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward, and eastward and westward ; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee.” And again, in the fifteenth chapter and the first verse, “ Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” And then, in this passage of great sublimity at the fifth verse,—“ The Lord brought him forth abroad and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to number them : and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be.”

In these repeated renewals of God’s promises, Abraham found support in this trying period of his life. “ He believed in the Lord :” he was fully persuaded that all that He had spoken He was able to perform ; and though to human thought it might appear impossible that his hope of inheriting the land of Canaan should ever be accomplished, yet he knew that nothing was impossible to God. And so he hoped even against hope : he was not weak in faith ; he dared to believe that, stranger as he was, separated from all intercourse with his own

people, childless, and now well stricken in years, he should yet become that mighty nation in whom all the families of the earth should find a blessing. And so "he believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." The Almighty viewed him with increased favour, and in token of it vouchsafed to reveal to him things that were to be hereafter. He showed him what should happen to his descendants; their early afflictions and their subsequent advancement: and not long after He changed his name from Abram, which means a high father, to Abraham, which denotes a father of a multitude of nations; declaring, as aforetime, that he should become exceeding powerful, and fruitful; that nations and kings should come out of him.

Nor was this all; that which had appeared as the greatest hindrance to Abraham's promised happiness was now removed: Sarah, when ninety years old, received strength to bear a son, and when past age, became the mother of Isaac: the mother of him concerning whom, before he was born, God had said, "With Isaac will I establish my covenant, and with his seed after him."

I must pass over much that remains of the history of Abraham; his intercession with the Almighty on behalf of wicked Sodom; the dismissal of Ishmael and Hagar,—matters full of interest and instruction, and carefully to be studied by all who would

obtain a full view of the noble character we are considering—and proceed to one other passage in the patriarch's life ; a passage which, familiar as it is to every reader of the Bible, can never be approached without its awakening in our minds sentiments of reverence amounting to awe, at the spectacle which it presents of self-denying faith and holy fortitude : I allude to the trial of Abraham by faith, in the offering up of his son Isaac.

The account is given us at full in the twenty-second chapter of Genesis ; and the chief points of it are as follows. “ It came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham : and he said, Behold, here I am. And God said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” Surely this was a commandment very hard to bear, even for one so habitually resigned to God's will as was Abraham. It was a commandment very grievous to flesh and blood. It was a call to Abraham to give up that which of all other things was dearest and most precious to him ; to give up to death, and that by his own hand, his only son : Isaac whom he loved : Isaac the son of his old age, the son at whose birth he had so greatly rejoiced, for whose sake he had cast out

Ishmael ; the son on whom was built all his hope of inheriting the promises of the Almighty ; the son which had been granted to him for this especial purpose, of whom it had been declared, " That in Isaac shall thy seed be called ! " Can the range of human record afford a parallel case to this ? Have we ever read, have we ever heard of a faith so sorely tried ? Was there ever such a sacrifice required by God of any of his creatures ? No, surely : there is nothing to which we can liken it amongst the bitterest sorrows, and most painful circumstances, that ever were allotted to the human kind. And no wonder : for in it was prefigured, shown forth before it came to pass, that greatest and most awful proof of the justice and compassion of our Heavenly Father ; the offering up of his only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our iniquity ; to be the Lamb of God, the Lamb provided by Himself, to take away the sins of the world.

But into the spiritual and typical meaning of Abraham's offering I must not enter to-day. What we have to consider is, the effect of that trial upon the patriarch himself ; how did he conduct himself under it ? Was it too hard for him ? Did he at length fail ? No, my brethren, he did not. Even in this bitter hour he did not shrink from the burden that was laid upon him. He murmured not at God's command, but hastened at

once to obey it. He “ rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for a burnt-offering, and rose up and went unto the place of which God had told him.” He went to the appointed spot, and when there, he built an “ altar and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son.” But the knife was not permitted to descend upon the child. The victory of faith was already gained ; every thought, every affection of Abraham’s heart had been subdued to the will of God : and that was enough. He who has no pleasure in the death of any man ; He who delighteth not in burnt-offering and sacrifice so much as in the ready obedience of a willing mind, had proved His servant to the uttermost, and now came to his relief. He sent His angel out of heaven, and called to him and said, “ Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him : for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.” “ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and beheld behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns ; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son.”

After such an instance of perfect submission to, and entire confidence in, the will of God, we need not seek further evidence in Abraham's history to illustrate what is said of him in the text. "He believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness." God, as a recompense for His servant's tried fidelity, looked upon and dealt with him as though he were, what no mere man can be, absolutely righteous: He blessed him and prospered him exceedingly; "He gave him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and men-servants and maid-servants, and camels and asses." Moreover, He fulfilled all that He promised to him; out of Abraham sprang the whole Jewish people: first Isaac, then Jacob, then the twelve patriarchs, from one of whom, from the family of Judah, in due time was born the desire of all nations,—Christ the Lord,—that great God and Saviour by whom, and through whom, the "blessing of Abraham" has been extended from the far-distant east, until it has reached even unto us. That blessing which is yet in the accomplishing, which must flow on and increase till it encircle within its bounds all the nations and all the countries of the world: "Till the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

And what is the blessing of Abraham in its widest and spiritual sense? Is it not this: that

we are justified or accounted righteous before God, not for our own works or deservings, (for these at the best are sadly imperfect,) but for the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ, through faith: that it is by believing in the Lord, believing as Abraham did, with all our heart, mind, and strength, that we become partakers in the blessedness of Christ's redemption. It was not written, as St. Paul tells us in his Epistle to the Romans, for Abraham's sake alone, that "his faith was counted unto him for righteousness;" but it was written for our sake as well, to whom it will be reckoned, "if we believe on Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." This surely is one great use that we ought to make of what Holy Scripture has revealed to us concerning Abraham. We should learn to look upon him as our forerunner in the way of gospel righteousness; the true pattern of what every true Christian should seek to be—a man rich in faith; and if rich in faith, then rich toward God; rich in all kindred graces and all kindred virtues.

Be it our part, my brethren, to profit by his example. For which cause let us endeavour to walk in the steps of holy Abraham; let us accustom ourselves, as he did, "to hold us fast by God," to put our whole trust and confidence in Him: let us

set to our seal that God is true ; that every tittle of his promises, yes, and of his threatenings, will in their proper season come to pass : let us, like Abraham, attend with reverence to every intimation of God's will, at whatever time, and in whatever way it addresses itself to us ; whether it speaks to us in the clear tones of the written word, or in the occurrences of our actual life : and when we hear it, let us obey : let us learn to submit our will to the will of God in all things : whatever He calls on us to do, let us do it heartily as unto the Lord ; whatever He appoints for us to suffer, let us endure it patiently and without complaint : let us assure ourselves that all His dispensations are just : that even in the day of distress and calamity God meaneth it for good. In short, my brethren, let us try to live as Abraham lived, by faith, and not by sight ; for God, not for ourselves ; for heaven, not for this world alone. It is for our interest, and for our happiness to do this : yes, and we have in the Holy Scriptures the greatest encouragement, the strongest incentive to such a course. The promise is secured to us which was given to Abraham,—“ They which be of faith,” says St. Paul, “ the same are blessed with faithful Abraham.” They are blessed in a twofold manner ; they are blessed here in the joy and peace which is the portion of true believers, and they will be blessed hereafter far

more exceedingly ; they will be blessed in that future state of being towards which we are hourly hastening, with a blessedness we can now but feebly conceive : when the trial of their faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, shall be found unto praise, and honour, “ and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

Little Hadham, February 28, 1847.

SERMON VII.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE.

ST. LUKE xiii. 3.—“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

THE season of Lent, on which we are now entering, has always, from very early times, been set apart for a period of humiliation and sorrow for sin,—a period which is especially appointed for calling our old ways to remembrance, for reflecting upon the punishments we have justly deserved, and for supplicating God’s mercy and forgiveness. The time of this season is forty days, for which several reasons have been alleged ; such as the drowning of the world with the great flood of waters ; the number of days allotted to the Ninevites for their repentance ; the duration of the fasts of Moses and Elias ; and above all, because when our Blessed Saviour,—He who had

no sin to repent of, no forgiveness to entreat, yet for some wise and holy purpose, thought fit to retire into the wilderness to solitude and silent meditation,—He observed the same length of time ; He fasted forty days and forty nights.

Whoever will consider these things, (be his practice what it may at this particular season,) he cannot but think that the number of days has not been fixed without due attention to the will of the Spirit as manifested in Holy Scripture, and that this period of Lent, forming as it does a considerable portion of the year, is not too long for the purpose at which it aims, the leading of sinners to repentance.

And yet, my brethren, how little regard do we pay to this season ; how changed is the observance of Lent to what it was in the earlier times !

With us it passes too generally as every portion of the year does, without producing in us one single effort more than ordinary after repentance. We go on as at other times in the daily business of our calling ; we are neither less nor more attentive to our soul's health,—neither less nor more diligent in the use of the means of grace ; our prayers are not more earnest or more frequent than at other seasons ; our minds are not troubled with meditations upon our past transgressions ; our consciences are not convinced of sin ; rarely do we lament the errors of

our former lives, and rarely do the fruits of a new and better life appear. We do not deny ourselves in any indulgence, nor put any unusual restraint upon our passions. I ask is not this the case with the generality? But it was not so of old: then, indeed, did men worthily lament them of their sins. Then did they turn to the Lord with all their heart, with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and this they did, not from formality—not because they trusted in the merit of the outward penance, but because they felt keenly the corruption of their evil nature, and could not endure the burden of unforgiven sin.

Therefore did they with willing earnestness, avail themselves of this season for redoubling their prayers, for mortifying their evil propensities, for seeking fresh supplies of the aid of that Holy Spirit, without which we can do nothing.

Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, which we barely notice, which but for the meeting of two or three together in God's house, to hear the sentence of His anger and judgment against sinners, and to join in those sorrowful confessions of our unworthiness, and in those expressive petitions for pardon, that the Church puts into our mouths,—Ash Wednesday, which but for this imperfect remembrance of it, would altogether slip out of our memory, has its name from an act of severe discipline, to which

the early Christians had recourse, to testify the depth of their sorrow and humiliation ; they used to clothe themselves in the coarsest garments, and sprinkle ashes on their hands and faces ; saying one to another, “ Remember O man that thou art ashes, and unto dust thou shalt return.”

To cover the head with ashes, was regarded aforetime as a mark of the deepest sorrow, and there are numerous examples of its being done in Holy Scripture. When Jonah preached to the Ninevites, the king (we read) “ arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth and sat in ashes.” And who is there who does not call to mind our Saviour’s words, respecting the impenitence, and blindness of those cities wherein He had gone preaching the Gospel of His Kingdom. “ Woe unto thee Chorazin ! Woe unto thee Bethsaida ! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”

I mention these things, my brethren, not because it is likely that we should in these days be led to imitate this particular act of penance, but only to show you, that repentance has ever been deemed a work of labour,—a work of self-abasement,—a work very needful to be done, and one that cannot be delayed with safety ; we cannot suppose that it is less

necessary for us, than it was for those who have gone before us, (and who lived in days purer than our own,) to humble ourselves, on the recollection of our many misdeeds, before the Lord our God, and to beg Him to have mercy upon us; we cannot suppose that we are less sinners than they were,—less in need of forgiveness. No, my brethren, our neglect of this season is no proof of our being able to do without it; our inattention to the disease of our souls is no proof that they are sound. Except we repent, we shall all likewise perish.

Let me then exhort you to consider well, the object of this present season. It is a season for retirement, for reflection, for earnest prayer, for self-humiliation, for self-abasement. It has been handed down to us from the beginning, as the universal observance of the christian church. It is sanctified by its being connected in its origin, with the solitude and humiliation of our Lord. It is, therefore, to be set apart from the ordinary course of our life,—to be dedicated to the remembrance of our sins, and of Him who died, that we might be saved from the consequences of them,—remembrances very painful, very sorrowful, but yet very requisite for us. In other words, it is a season set apart for repentance; and as such it should be used, or else instead of being of service to us, it will only do us harm: like every other neglected privi-

lege and opportunity of religious growth, it will increase our condemnation at the last. Let us not then any longer abuse the goodness of God in calling us mercifully to amendment: He has spared our lives to this present hour, on purpose that we might (all who have not yet done so) truly turn to Him; let us take heed betimes, "while the day of salvation lasteth, for the night cometh when no man can work;" let us while we have the light "walk as children of light," that we be not cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Turn ye" (saith the Lord,) in that address (so full of scriptural language) which is appointed to be read on Ash Wednesday, "turn ye, from all your wickedness, and your sin shall not be your destruction. Cast away from you all your ungodliness that ye have done, make you new hearts and a new spirit. Wherefore will ye die, O ye house of Israel, seeing that I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God? Turn ye, then, and ye shall live."

For, my brethren, (and here is our encouragement; here is the reason why the greatest offender amongst us, the man who has most gone astray from God's commandments, may yet consider that he is included in this invitation,) although we have sinned, yet have we an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitia-

tion for our sins : “ He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with his stripes we are healed.”

Let us, therefore, return unto Him, who is the merciful receiver of all true penitents, assuring ourselves that He is willing to receive us, and most willing to pardon us if we come unto Him with faithful repentance.

Having said thus much about the origin and design of this season of Lent, and having shown that it was intended to help us forward in the great work of repentance, without which there can be no salvation, and having urged you to employ it for that purpose, in the remainder of this discourse I shall endeavour to explain *what that repentance* is, which is so necessary,—what is the nature of that state of mind of which our Lord said, “ Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

Now repentance is not merely, as some imagine, sorrow for having done wrong ; this may be found, and often *is* found, in a sinner who is yet very far from repentance. Judas, who betrayed his Lord, had sorrow ; sorrow so keen, and so intolerable that it drove him to destruction, “ He went and hanged himself ;” but Judas did not know repentance, else it would not have been written of him that it were good for him “ that he had never been

born." No, his sorrow was the sorrow that worketh death,—that sorrow which still worketh in the children of disobedience, which is the necessary and inseparable attendant upon sin. The sorrow that the sinner feels, not because of the sin he has committed but because of the punishment which he fears will come upon him.

But, then, you will ask, has sorrow no part in producing repentance? Yes, surely. There is a sorrow which is called in the Bible godly sorrow, a sorrow which a man feels for having offended God,—for having done that which is displeasing to Him ; a sorrow for sin because it is sin, and not only on account of its consequences ; and it is this sorrow that worketh repentance. Godly sorrow is the root and stem, repentance is the fruit which grows upon it ; and as the tree is known by its fruits, so is this true sorrow to be distinguished from that false and unreal sorrow, which is only occasioned by the dread of some immediate penalty.

Accordingly, wherever this sorrow is felt, it ought and must lead to a whole change in our life ; for it is when we first feel how loathsome sin is in itself ; how loathsome it makes those that are defiled by it, in the sight of the pure and holy God ;—it is then, that we shall be in earnest in fleeing from it, and from everything that tempts us towards it ;—it is then that we shall forsake and renounce, as well as

confess, and be sorry for our misdoing ;—it is then that we shall endeavour all we can to obey God, and to keep his commandments with our whole heart.

And *this is repentance*, a word which in its original and scriptural sense, signifies a complete change of mind and conduct : implying two things, the leaving undone, and utterly renouncing what is wrong and of the nature of sin ; and the doing what is good and right in the sight of the Lord God : the abandoning our old and wicked ways, and entering upon a new path—a narrow, and a straight path—but, my brethren, the only path that leadeth unto life.

For I do not wish to deceive you by soft words ; I dare not describe as easy and pleasant that, which to our corrupt nature must ever be, at the first painful, and difficult. We are in this world as regards our souls in a state of sickness, and disease ; it is partly the fault, and corruption born in us, and derived from the guilt of our first parents ; it is greatly increased, and aggravated by our own carelessness and folly—by our neglecting to restrain our evil tendencies, (through the help of those means that are mercifully provided for us,) and by our giving way to our evil passions, and so fostering instead of checking their growth : and hence it comes that the longer we live, (unless we have been taught the right way betimes,) the greater is our

malady ; the more are we estranged from God, the more are we disinclined to His service ; consequently, the stronger is the remedy required for our cure. Like a bad habit of body, a bad habit of mind needs skilful treatment, and constant attention. Those who are afflicted in the body know well, how long it takes to recover from their ailment ; how much they have to submit to ; how many bitter medicines they have to take, before they can regain their strength. And so it is with the soul, and with that spiritual disease under which we all labour. If we would recover, we must not draw back from the proper treatment, we must not refuse to apply that medicine which our Lord in His Gospel prescribes for us—we must be at pains, and at cost to be healed—we must at His bidding curb our unruly tempers—we must withstand our inclinations when they tend to evil—we must mortify our members—we must renounce, and cast away from us, those sinful lusts and appetites of our flesh, which if left to have their way, will “ eat as doth a canker ” to our destruction. Fornication, uncleanness, drunkenness, intemperance of every sort and kind,—these must be put away from us before there can be any prospect of our amendment. Whatever be the sin which most inveterately besets us, to which we are most given, *that* sin must be rooted out, though it be dear to

us as our right hand, or as one of our eyes. And why? because if we keep it we shall *perish*—because, as our Lord hath told us, “it is better to enter into life, halt or maimed, than having two hands or two eyes (that is, retaining all our forbidden indulgences) to be cast into hell.”

This comparison between diseases of the body and diseases of the soul, leads me to one further remark. There are some maladies that happen to the body, the remedies for which are so severe, that it is a question with the sufferers whether they will use them, even though assured that their recovery depends upon their so doing: there are cases in which the means of cure seem more dreadful than death itself, and persons have been known who have preferred to die of their disorder, rather than endure the torture of the operation recommended to them: but this you will at once allow cannot be said of the diseases of the soul—of the disease of sin with which we are all afflicted: the end, indeed, of this malady, unless we be healed in time, is also death; but how dreadful is that death! It is not the mere cessation of life—it is not the lying down in the calm slumber of the grave—it is not the destruction of our being; but it is the destruction and utter ruin of all our hopes, and of all our happiness. It is an exclusion from God's love, and God's light for ever; the perpetual abiding with the evil spirits in their torments.

Such is what is called in the language of Scripture, eternal death: Such are the appointed wages of unforgiven sin! Surely, my brethren, we would not for any present gratification run the risk of so terrible an award. Surely there is no remedy, however sharp and painful, which we would not apply now rather than incur hereafter the bitter pains of eternal death!

That remedy I have already pointed out. *It is repentance.* How effectual, how comforting a thing it is, when fully followed out, I leave to the consideration of another sermon.

May God grant that you and I may have grace to use it, to our soul's health. May we not be among that sad number, who shall perish because of their not repenting, but rather may we (by His mercy) have our consciences so awakened to a sense of our unworthiness, and "so truly repent us of our faults" in this world, that we may ever live with Him in the world to come, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Little Hadham, 1846.

SERMON VIII.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

EZEKIEL xviii. 27.—“ When the wicked man turneth away from the wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.”

IN my sermon last Sunday, I spoke of the season of Lent, as a time for calling our old ways to remembrance, reflecting upon our past sins, and seeking God's pardon and forgiveness ; in a word, as a time for repentance. I then entered into an explanation of what is meant by repentance, viz., a complete change of mind ; leading us to forsake the evil, and to choose the good.

I further showed you, that this repentance was absolutely necessary to our salvation ; that except we repent, we must all perish. To-day it will be my endeavour to carry out the subject to its con-

clusion ; and show, for the comfort of all truly penitent hearts, the efficacy and healing power of repentance. " When the wicked man (saith the prophet) turneth away from the wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive."

In the first place, who is it that is meant by the wicked man ? Is it the transgressor of God's most holy laws ? Is it the adulterer, the murderer, the robber ? Yes, surely these may, no doubt, claim the bad distinction of this name ; these are peculiarly wicked men ; they are peculiarly God's enemies ; for them His sharpest punishments are prepared. But do not suppose that they *only*, are included in this term. Far from it ; as all who are not righteous are unrighteous, and as there is none that doeth right, so are all, more or less, to be classed under this head. We have all gone astray from God's commandments : we have all sinned, and come short of our duty ; we have all deserved God's anger and punishment. In His sight, His pure and holy sight, we are all wicked. In short, it is clear that we have all an interest in the exhortation of the text—we have all cause, great cause, to turn away from our wickedness that we have committed, and take those steps towards being cleared of our guilt and cleansed from our sins, that will render us acceptable in the presence of

our Maker ; we have all cause to do " that which is lawful and right," if we hope to save our souls alive.

The question is, what are those steps? How are we, who have followed our own ways to do evil, so to walk as to please God? How can we, who have become entangled in the snares of sin, get ourselves released? How can we dare to hope, that after having, by our own confession, deeply offended against God, justly deserved his anger, we may yet, by anything that we can do, return into His favour, and be made partakers of His love?

This inquiry leads us to the fountain-head of our religion; to the means by which a sinner may humbly but confidently expect forgiveness, if so be that he is really penitent; if so be, that he gives proof of his sincerity, by bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. The reason why, in such a case, he may hope and reckon upon being pardoned, is simply because the Lamb of God, without spot, hath been revealed, who taketh away the sins of the world; because Christ the Lord has been wounded for his, and all men's transgressions, and hath, by the sacrifice of Himself once offered upon the cross, made a full and perfect propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins, both original, and actual, of the whole world. Yes, my brethren, assuredly there is no other satisfaction for sin

but this alone. No man ever was, or ever can be forgiven, but through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. He, and He only, can wash away the defilement of sin from our souls; He, who in His glorious perfection is all holiness, all purity, can alone make us holy and purify us as to Himself; only by Him have we access to the Father, and to that grace wherein we stand; only because of His name's sake, for the sake of His own beloved Son, can the Almighty pardon our iniquity.

The first, step, then, that the sinner must take in seeking to be restored to God's favour, is to ask His mercy in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—to make that his plea, his only plea, in arrest of judgment; to ground his hope of acceptance solely upon the promises that are made to him in Christ's name. And where else should we fly for refuge? on what other ground could we hope that our sins would be forgiven? Think yourselves, my brethren, how desperate your condition would be, were it not for the knowledge of Christ's redemption!

The effect of sin is, to separate man from God—to cause him to seek to escape from the presence of his Maker; so Adam, after his sad transgression, when he heard the voice of God, "hid himself, because he was afraid." And separation only adds to the difficulty of reconciliation. Shrinking

from God, and seeking to banish Him from our thoughts, pretending to be indifferent to Him, only so much the more certainly exposes us to His severe visitation.

The fact is, we, who live in the light of the Gospel revelation, and are (by name at least) believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, can hardly realise to ourselves the misery of those who in this world are without the knowledge of the Son of God; without the knowledge of *that* name through which alone the breach can be restored, that sin has made between man and His Maker.

We have that knowledge; would that we were thankful for it as we ought to be, for then it would have its proper effect upon our lives. *We* (through God's mercy) are not strangers to His promises—our eyes have seen, our ears have heard, what many prophets, many righteous men sought in vain to learn; we know that we “have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.”

Here, then, my brethren, is our support, here is our encouragement to repentance, because what we ourselves could never furnish, namely, an adequate satisfaction for our misdeeds, has been supplied to us. Repentance is as necessary as ever it was for us all; deep sorrow for sin, followed by active persevering efforts to lead holier lives: but, along

with repentance, is preached that blessed doctrine which the Gospel first brought to light, forgiveness of sins ; forgiveness, yea, *full* forgiveness, because of the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through faith in His blood.

Such is the mercy of God in preparing for us a way for our recovery ; “ He so loved us that He gave His only-begotten Son ” to die for our sins. Could a stronger proof of His goodness be desired than this ? Is it not plain that while He is most mighty, He is also most merciful ? Full of compassion ; a God who willeth not our death—that eternal death which is the consequence of sin—but that we should rather turn from our sins, and be saved. But let us not abuse His mercy ; let us not suppose that sin is less hateful in His sight than before, or that we may commit it and yet go unpunished. Let us remember *our* part, or else we shall find (it may be too late) that the Gospel, instead of being a “ savour of life,” has, through our misapplication of it, become a “ savour of death.” For this purpose, consider well the words of the prophet,—“ When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.”

Now, though it is very certain that nothing can put away sin but the merits of the Saviour ; though none of us can redeem our own souls from the

penalty due to our transgressions, yet we are not to suppose that God will forgive us, unless there be in us a hearty forsaking of our iniquity, and a hearty endeavour to live up to His commandments. Forgiveness of sins is indeed a great mercy; it is the characteristic doctrine of the Gospel; but it is never separated from amendment of life.

Therefore, my brethren, seeing how much we owe to God for His exceeding goodness, in preparing for us a way of escape from His anger; seeing that ourselves, our souls, and our bodies, which are by nature born in sin, and liable to its punishment, have been made free from this thralldom,—have been purchased back from the bondage of corruption, at the price of so terrible a sacrifice,—even the cost of the blood of the Son of God;—let us take care that we render unto Him the things that are His; every faculty of our minds; all the powers of our bodies, as instruments for His glory;—let us see that we live as the redeemed of the Lord, and while we give to Christ the honour due unto His name; while we attribute to Him, and to His Spirit alone, every step in the work of our redemption, let us not imagine that we have nothing to do but to receive His grace, and to profit by His sufferings.

Let us, as true servants and disciples of the cross, be always about our Master's business. As

He that hath called us is holy, so should we aim after holiness in all manner of conversation. True, that of ourselves we can do no good thing; it is "God that worketh in us both to will and to do after His good pleasure," but then it is on this very ground; because of God's help, that we are called upon by the Apostle to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling." Let us, then, be on the alert; let us use those means that are within our reach, in order to fulfil our part in the great and indispensable work of repentance; in order that we may be enabled to turn away from our wickedness, and bring forth fruits unto everlasting life: let us strive against sin in our members; let us eschew evil and do good: and chiefly let us entreat earnestly the help of God's Holy Spirit, and prepare our hearts for His reception by the study of His word; by serious reflection, and often meditation upon our spiritual progress, upon the state of our souls.

The necessity of using every exertion will be apparent to us, when we consider the natural unwillingness there is in us to work the works of God:—how prone we are to disobey Him, how little we can of ourselves withstand temptation. Is it not a matter of every day's experience how difficult, how almost *impossible* it is, to overcome any habit, even the most trivial, which has once insinuated

itself into our minds ? what struggles ; what watchfulness ; what backslidings ; what disappointments ; what defeats, what unhappiness it has cost us ; and if it be thus difficult to get rid of even an innocent though unprofitable habit, what must it be in the case supposed in my text—in the case of our besetting sins ! How tenfold more difficult must it be for a confirmed sinner—a *wicked man*, (in the strongest sense of the word,) to turn away “from his wickedness that he hath committed,”—his own self-acted wickedness,—so entirely identical with himself as to be called his own wickedness, because it is part and parcel of his being : how difficult must it be for such a one as this to turn so completely away, that he may do that which he hath so long left undone, viz. “*That which is lawful and right !*” Such a man has not to struggle with one bad habit, but with a multitude ; not with one evil spirit, but with many. For nothing is more certain, than that one evil habit, unless resisted and got the better of betimes, is the fruitful parent of many more ; and though if at the beginning a man strive against his weakness, he will (by God’s help) be victorious over it, yet the chance of his success is greatly lessened when, by reason of his self-indulgence, he has strengthened the hands of the enemy, and admitted Satan, not by one avenue, but by many, to enter in and take possession of his soul.

When such is the miserable situation of a sinner; when his whole character is defiled by vice, so that all his thoughts, words, and wishes are only to do evil, will it not be asked of him, in the language of the prophet, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" Can it be possible for one so saturated and steeped in wickedness to alter for the better? Is he not beyond the bounds of repentance? The Bible, my brethren, encourages us to hope that he is not. The things which seem impossible to human power are possible to God, and however improbable his amendments may appear, God's mercy forbids us to despair; for what says the prophet Isaiah? "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." But *one* prayer uttered in earnest from a smitten conscience: but *one* struggle, the desperate struggle like that of a parting soul, and the work of penitence may have begun, even in the heart of the most notorious offender; that work so begun, may by God's mercy and grace, be carried on until he that was possessed by a legion of devils—he, whose whole life was torn and distracted by the violence of his passions—shall be healed; brought by the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the teaching of His Spirit, to a right mind, and so at the

last find a place on the right hand of God, and be reckoned amongst those for whom there is no condemnation, because they are in Christ Jesus. "When the wicked man turneth away" seriously, resolutely, and with all his strength, "from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive;" because, continues Ezekiel, "he considereth and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die."

Lay up these words in your minds, and look upon them as God's voice, calling you to repentance. Lay them up, and reflect upon them day by day, that you may be quickened in the work that is before you, while as yet there is time; before the Lord come out of His place to visit the wickedness of such as dwell upon the earth; then, in that day, it will be too late; *then* is the time for justice; *now* is the season of mercy; therefore, my brethren, take heed betimes, while the day of salvation lasteth; repentance admits of no delay, and what is more, it admits of no end. While we remain on earth we are daily offending against God, and daily stand in need of His forgiveness; *our whole life must be one long course of repentance*; the moment we cease to repent, we cease to remember that we are sinners, and conse-

quently we lose sight of Him who alone can save us from our sins.

It is not then without a good reason that our Church begins her service with these words ; it is not without a true care for our souls that she meets us at the very threshold of the house of prayer, with a declaration of our corruption, and of our wickedness, and an announcement of God's marvellous loving-kindness towards us, telling us that " if we turn away from the wickedness that we have committed, and do that which is lawful and right, we shall save our souls alive."

May we never lose the benefit of her instruction ; may we never come into these courts but with reverence and godly fear, with humble and contrite hearts ; as sinners who stand in need of pardon ; with a deep sense of our own unworthiness, and yet with a stedfast faith in God's promises made to us in His Beloved Son : for in such a frame of mind we should surely come hither for our profit, we should surely (by His blessing) find that which is indeed above all price and value ; that peace of mind, and rest to a troubled conscience, which God, by the mouth of His minister, promises, and pronounces to all them who truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His Holy Gospel.

" Let the wicked," says Isaiah, in a passage exactly parallel to the one in the text, " forsake

his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ;
and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have
mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will
abundantly pardon him."

Little Hadham, 1846.

SERMON IX.

THE FAST DAY.

ISAIAH xxvi. 9.—“ When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness.”

THE occasion of our solemn meeting this day, my brethren, in the courts of the Lord's house, is one with which you are all well acquainted ; it is to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, in order that we may obtain the pardon of our sins, and the return of His favour, at a crisis of great calamity ; it is to pray for the removal of those heavy judgments which our manifold sins and provocations have most justly deserved, and with which Almighty God is pleased to visit the iniquities of this land by a grievous scarcity and dearth of divers articles of sustenance and necessities of life.

Such is the purpose for which we are assembled

together ; and as far as attention to the *letter* of what has been appointed goes, that purpose has been fulfilled ; we have (those of us that are here present) humbled ourselves before our God ; we have bowed down on our knees, and confessed with our lips, “ that we are vile earth and miserable sinners ;” that “ by our strifes, and divisions, and misuse of God’s gifts, and forgetfulness of His mercies, we have justly deserved punishment ;” we have cast ourselves upon His compassion, and entreated Him to succour us ; entreated Him by the name that appeals to His covenanted promises ; entreated Him, as “ the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort,” to look down from heaven, to behold, visit, and relieve our country, in this day of our affliction.

Indeed, the whole language of the service, in which we have been engaged, has been that of penitence, resignation, and good resolves, and cannot, we may hope and trust, fail to be acceptable before God, if it has been offered in a humble and reverential spirit ; whether that has been the case, can be known only to Him who seeth the heart ; He only can judge whether we have been *sincere* or *insincere*, in what we have uttered before Him this day ; whether we have lifted up our hearts, with our hands, to Him in the heavens. He only can tell whether our fast is a mere form, or such a fast

as He hath chosen, viz. the devout humiliation of our whole soul; the rending of our hearts in sorrow for our past offences, with an unfeigned desire henceforth to approve ourselves more faithful, and more obedient, to His holy laws. Be this as it may, one thing is clear, and this is, that the object and intention for which this fast has been appointed will not have been rightly met, unless such has been its effect upon our hearts; that intention is, to obtain relief from God by a national repentance; by a general humiliation of the whole land, on account of our secret sins, as well as for the open wickedness, carelessness, and ungodliness which abounds on all sides; and therefore in proportion as we fail in the performance of this duty, in bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, in that proportion do we thwart the pious design of our rulers, and (if we may say it without irreverence) in that proportion do we stand in the way of the succour that we so much need, and which can come from God only.

Having said thus much of the temper of mind that best befits the solemnity of this day, I will proceed to a few remarks on the general character of God's judgments, and the purpose for which they are designed, as may be gathered out of the Scriptures of the Old Testament; which purpose is well expressed in the words I have taken for my

text; "*When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*"

For this cause, let me call to your minds the lesson appointed for the Morning Service, the eighth chapter of the first Book of Kings. It is selected out of that most beautiful prayer which Solomon composed at the dedication of the magnificent temple which he had built for the worship of Jehovah, verses 35—40. "When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain because they have sinned against thee; if they pray towards this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin when thou afflictest them: then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance." And again, "If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust; or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be; what prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house; then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose

heart thou knowest ; (for thou only knowest the hearts of all the children of men ;) that they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest up to our fathers."

It is clear from these verses what was the view in which the wise monarch of Israel regarded those grievous afflictions of drought, pestilence, mildew, plague, sickness, and famine, that from time to time fall upon the inhabitants of the earth ; and which we are too apt to account for from natural causes, and to seek to alleviate exclusively by remedies of our own devising. It is clear, I say, that Solomon looked on such things in a very different light: he regarded them as (what they really are) *visitations, judgments* from God ; judgments inflicted as a punishment for sin : and as he regarded them in their true light, so does he give the best directions as to the course to be pursued for their removal ; that course is prayer, confession of sin, and repentance ; "*What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house ; then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways whose heart thou knowest.*"

Nor is Solomon the only authority we have to consult on this matter ; but generally all the pro-

phets and teachers whose writings are recorded in the Old Testament ; witness the prophets Joel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, out of whose books portions are appointed for this day's service ; they all concur in representing such calamities, as those under which part of these realms is now labouring, as inflictions of the Almighty ; inflictions imposed both as a punishment for past sin, and a warning against continuing in it ; all concur in setting forth the same remedies ; in insisting upon the exercise of prayer, confession of sin, and humiliation before God, as the best resources of a nation, the readiest way to obtain deliverance and relief from its distress.

Yes, and not only do the Holy Scriptures teach this doctrine respecting God's judgments, but they further afford us eminent examples of the good results that attend a hearty belief in it, and a practice of those acts of penitence that it prescribes. David, we read, in the twenty-fourth chapter of the second Book of Samuel, tempted by Satan, had provoked God through the pride of his heart in numbering the people, whereupon the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel ; a pestilence so deadly and so general, that though it lasted but three days, there died in that time seventy thousand men. What was the conduct of the Psalmist under the weight of this severe calamity ? He presented himself before God, and offered sacrifices before Him ;

and "the Lord," we read, "was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel."

Another instance, and the last I shall mention, is well known, and is that of Nineveh; and this is the more remarkable, because it shows the effect of timely humiliation, in warding off impending calamities: Jonah, the prophet of the Almighty, had received a mission from Him, to preach to the Ninevites, the destruction of their city; it was a city of vast magnitude, and amongst the most powerful of the world in that day; a city, as it is described, of twenty-three days' journey in circuit; a city, in which there were more than six hundred thousand people; but it was a city given to idolatry and wickedness, and so it was threatened with the wrath of God: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," was the cry of Jonah as he passed along the streets of the populous city. Yet Nineveh for all this was not destroyed; and why? The people "*believed God.*" When the words of the prophet reached the ears of the king, "he arose from his throne," and "covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes:" (marks of humiliation, still practised by the eastern nations;) and he issued a proclamation for the like to be done by his subjects, decreeing, that neither man, nor beast, herd nor flock, should taste anything; but "be covered with sackcloth and cry mightily

unto God :” “ Yea,” said the words of the proclamation, (and they are very much those that have been put forth on the present occasion for our use,) “ let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not ?”

The result of this general, and sincere humiliation of the whole people of Nineveh, was as beneficial to themselves, as it is admonitory, and encouraging to all who read the record in the Bible. “ God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way ; and God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them ; and *He did it not.*”

Such, my brethren, is what the Bible teaches respecting God’s judgments ; it tells us both their cause and their remedy ; their cause is the wickedness of man—provoking, and bringing down upon his head, the displeasure of an offended God : the remedy is, the forsaking of that wickedness ; and turning to God in humility and contrition of heart ; in one word, *Repentance.*

Further, the Bible encourages us to have recourse to this remedy by exhibiting many signal instances, in which it has been used with success. In the case of David, in the case of Rehoboam, in the case of Ahab, of Jehoshaphat, of Manasseh, in the case of the Ninevites, and many more that I

could name, we are presented with proofs of the efficacy of timely humiliation and repentance.

It only remains to apply this knowledge, to the case immediately before us. The hand of the Almighty is visibly stretched over us in anger; for two successive years, has He broken the staff of food throughout a large portion of these realms: nor is it in Ireland only that there are marks of His visitation; but in this country as well; yes, and in many other countries of the world: true it is, (and thankful should we be,) that the visitation here has hitherto been far less grievous than in our sister nation; so little grievous, that we scarcely like to call it by so awful a name; we scarcely like to think that we too are lying under God's displeasure; but surely it were wiser to acknowledge such to be the case even now; there is great scarcity and dearth already in our land of almost all articles necessary for our sustenance; scarcity and dearth that has been gradually increasing for several months past, and which has materially affected the comfort of large classes of our countrymen: and who can say, that this scarcity and dearth shall not, ere another twelve months come round, have become that, of which it is often the forerunner, viz. actual famine? Who can say that the dreadful and heartrending accounts which daily reach our ears of the sufferings of our

fellow-subjects in Ireland, may not by next year be realized by sights of equal misery and distress amongst our own people? What, if the next harvest on which so much depends should prove a failure,—what, if that blight, which has almost deprived us of the help of one great staple article of food—a blight as unforeseen as it is yet unaccountable on any known grounds,—what, if that blight should also fall upon another portion of the earth's produce,—what, if *our corn* should become infected by it? Would there not ensue a burthen of misery, such as is fearful to the mind to contemplate? And yet, my brethren, there can be no question but that this calamity is possible. It is as easy for the Almighty to command the clouds that they pour no rain upon our hitherto favoured fields, or to cause the seed to rot under the clod, as it was for Him to do that which He hath wrought in Ireland; it is as easy; and may we not add, that it is likely, that He should so visit us? If the affliction in that land be represented (as the Bible teaches us to consider it) as a judgment for national wickedness, what, I would ask you, can we allege why the like punishment should not reach also unto us? Are we less sinners than they? Is there less forgetfulness of God—less abuse of His mercies—less mistrust of His promises—less disregard of His ordinances amongst us, than there is in Ireland?

My brethren, I dare not think that there is ; for to say nothing of that acknowledged profligacy which is rife in all our large towns, when I only consider what falls within the limits of my own observation, within the bounds of this single parish ; when I reflect upon the many offences daily committed against God,—the swearing that we hear on every side,—the drinking that is indulged in,—the sabbath-breaking to which it often leads, and the profanation of which it increases and aggravates,—the bad words spoken,—the bad deeds allowed,—the backbiting and quarrels so frequent in occurrence,—when I think of the neglect of parents in not training up their families in the way wherein they ought to go, and of the consequences of such neglect,—in the disobedience of children,—in the growing up of sons and daughters to be the shame and sorrow of their parents ;—when I think of the frequent falls of our young women from the path of virtue,—of the shameless and scandalous lives of some of our men ;—when (I say) the thought of these things crosses my mind ; and when I consider that what is going on here, is going on in every village throughout England ; when at the same time I recollect what God says of Himself in Holy Scripture that He is so holy that he charges His angels with folly : that the very “heavens are not clean in his sight ;” that He cannot bear to look upon iniquity ;—

I come to the conclusion, that so far from being in a position to claim any exemption (on account of superior merit) from the chastisement that has overtaken our brethren in Ireland, we have need to confess, that we are most justly deserving of it; that if the Almighty were to be "extreme to mark what we have done amiss," we could not abide it; that it is only owing to His infinite compassion and mercy that "we are not altogether consumed." "Suppose ye," are our Lord's words, "that those Galileans, were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you nay: but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." Yes; this is the alternative, the merciful alternative, that is still offered to us; may we have grace to lay hold upon it, and to exercise ourselves therein; as the surest method to obtain, and secure, God's forfeited protection; may we have grace to repent both as individuals and as members of a great nation.

As a nation, as forming a part of a large whole, we are engaged in the work (the wholesome and necessary work) of repentance to-day. The priests, —the ministers of the Lord,—are at this hour standing in every church throughout England, to offer up the collected prayers of their several congregations. The general confession of the country's sin; the general resolution of the people to forsake it,

has gone up before God, an offering—we may not doubt it—acceptable in His sight. So far we have done well : but let us not rest satisfied with this single act of duty ; let us not suppose that our humiliation is complete, our repentance finished, because we have for one day stopped in the middle of our six days worldly toil, and stood still to commune with the Lord our God. No : national repentance is an object most truly to be desired ; but national repentance to be of any effect,—to be serviceable for remedying the national distress,—must be followed by national amendment. “ *When God's judgments are in all the earth, then shall the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.* ”

Such amendment, such learning of righteousness must begin with, and be carried on separately in each individual heart. Therefore let me in conclusion, urge this upon you, as the sum and substance of this day's solemnity, the necessity of walking more humbly and more closely with God, and more charitably with our neighbours ; for which cause let us search out our ways, and turn unto the Lord ; let us, one and all, seek to know each the plague of his own heart ; let us look well and narrowly into ourselves ; let us see what are our besetting sins—what are our peculiar failings—what are the evil habits to which we are most addicted—what in short it is that separates between us and

God : Is it pride ? Is it sensuality ? Is it anger ? Is it readiness to take offence ? Is it evil speaking ? Is it an envious and jealous temper ? Is it uncharitableness ? Is it covetousness ? Is it indifference to religious duties ? Is it the neglect, the allowed neglect of any ordinance of God, any means of grace ? Is it one, or more, or many of these things ? Let *conscience* decide : and let *us* act upon her decision ; in what point she convicts us of having sinned ; there let humiliation,—there let repentance be applied ; let us put away from us the evil thing ;— long as we may have indulged in it—strong as its hold may be upon us—let us put it away—let us loose its yolk from off our necks ; for it is an accursed thing and destructive to our real peace. We cannot keep our sins, and yet keep ourselves in the love of Christ.

Let us then “ purge out the old leaven, the leaven of malice and wickedness,” and turn unto the Lord with our whole hearts. It is not an easy work that we have to do—this work of self-reformation ; but it is one for the performance of which we have God’s promise of the strongest help—the help of His Holy Spirit ; and moreover it is a work best suited, as a discipline for our souls, and as a remedy for the present necessity.

God, who as the scriptures show us, once at the fervent entreaty of a single righteous man, stayed

His avenging arm, and turned a season of three years drought into one of fertility and plenty, will not, we may trust, be less graciously disposed towards us, if we come before Him "with the preparation of a clean heart and a right mind;" He will surely hear our cry, and fulfil our desire; He will, as in the days of old, again bid the earth bring forth her fruit; He will open His hand in love and fill all things living with plenteousness. He will: because he has promised it in these words: "*If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their evil ways; then will I hear from Heaven and forgive their sin, and will heal this land.*"

Little Hadham, March 24th, 1847.

SERMON X.

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1 COR. vi. 18.—“Flee fornication.”

THE collect for to-day contains an earnest prayer to God for grace to withstand the temptations to which as corrupt beings we are exposed—temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Under these three heads may be reduced all the perils and dangers which beset our path : and prevent us from doing that to which we are called ; from following God with pure hearts and minds. To speak of them all at one time would be impossible, and as my object is sufficiently manifest by the words taken for my text, I shall confine my remarks this afternoon to the single consideration of those sins—those grievous deadly sins—which arise from yielding to *the temptations of the flesh*. It is not, indeed, without great reluctance that I enter upon so

painful a subject; the sins of which I must speak, are such as should not even be mentioned among Christians. "But fornication," (says St. Paul,) "and all uncleanness, let it not be once named among you as becometh saints." And yet this same Apostle, as the text shows, (and the lesson we have heard this afternoon, the sixth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians,) was *obliged* to speak at large about these very sins: and so must a Christian minister still speak. As long as these foul vices, instead of being shunned and abhorred as the deadliest evils, are commonly practised amongst us, to the great scandal of our holy religion, so long must we lift up our voice in open protest against them, and warn you to flee from their pollution.

The present occasion appears the more fitting for such a caution. As the chapter in which St. Paul treats of this very subject has already been read in the course of the second lesson, to which, while it is fresh in your minds, I can appeal for confirmation of what I am about to say.

In that chapter many deadly sins are enumerated,—*theft, covetousness, drunkenness, evil-speaking, &c.*, but this of fornication,—under which term I may once for all observe, are included all kinds of impurity and uncleanness,—every wanton lust of the flesh,—is dwelt upon at length; and for this

reason, because unchastity is of all sins the one most repugnant, most contrary to our Christian profession ; most surely fatal in its consequences ; because it defiles the body as well as the soul : and the body and soul of a Christian are consecrated to God. " The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord." *It*, not less than the soul, has been redeemed by Him from the bondage of sin and death. It has been bought at the price of His own most precious blood : and therefore it is no longer to be treated as a common thing ; no longer to be given up to the service of Satan, and to the working of iniquity ; no—but to be kept, and maintained clean and pure, for the worship and service of the Almighty, and for the habitation of His Holy Spirit—" Know ye not," says the Apostle, " that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God. And ye are not your own ; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, *which are God's.*"

This, indeed, seems high and lofty language to be applied to us men—but it is the very language of Holy Writ, and we cannot by our forgetfulness of, or indifference to it, alter its truth. Nothing is more sure than this ; that the Christian is everywhere throughout the epistle looked upon " as a vessel made to honour ;" set apart, separate from sinners, through the sanctification of God's Spirit.

It is not, then, without just alarm for his welfare that I feel it my duty to caution you against the slightest approach to the sin of uncleanness: for they who are guilty of it, are guilty of grieving the Holy Ghost; guilty of resisting His grace, without which it is impossible to please God. But is this caution necessary? Are there many who are so regardless of their eternal welfare as to run into such wickedness? Alas! I fear their number is great indeed! Scarcely do six months ever elapse, seldom so long, without some infants being brought hither to be baptized, that have been born in fornication. And then—I speak it with sorrow—how often is the sacred rite of marriage only sought as a cloke for open shame! How often do parents let their daughters leave their homes and associate with their future husbands, before God's holy law has given any sanction to their union.

My brethren, these things ought not so to be. They ought not to be, even amongst untutored heathen, amongst men who have no rule to guide them but the rule of natural modesty,—no law to restrain them but the law of common decency. Even among the heathen such doings are looked upon as a scandal. How fearful, then, must be their guilt among those who like ourselves are Christians! Who—to refer again to the same chapter—have “been washed,” (in the water of re-

generation,) “ and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God,” —washed, and sanctified, and justified for this very end; that we should no longer be defiled by carnal lusts, but denying these, live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

And then, look at the consequences of such sins. To say that they are always attended with trouble, and disgrace to those who are guilty of them,—trouble and disgrace that affect not themselves alone, but their friends and families as well: this is to describe but a small part of the mischief: these are but the immediate and present results of this wickedness. But let me ask you—let me beg of you to ask yourselves—what is this misery, this disgrace, and trouble, when compared with that far greater misery, far more lasting woe, which awaits these transgressions in the world to come? What is present pain, compared with the pain that never has an end? And such, and no less, is the pain and punishment prepared for this wickedness by the Almighty. Not only will it shut men out from heaven, but it will, unless repented of heartily and forsaken in time, thrust them down to hell; “ Neither fornicators nor adulterers shall inherit the kingdom of God.” And again writes the same Apostle, as if to prevent any mistake about the matter—“ This ye know that no whoremonger nor

unclean person hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." And his testimony is thus confirmed by St. John in the Revelation: who declares with authority from on high—"That whoremongers shall have their part with murderers, sorcerers, liars, idolaters, in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone for ever—which is the second death."

Such—if there be truth in God's holy book—is the heavy burthen of wrath which they are heaping up for themselves against the day of judgment, who now yield up their members as instruments to uncleanness. It is terrible for the mind to entertain the thought of what is appointed them; how much more terrible for those who will have to endure it who will have to dwell with everlasting burnings: where the worm never dieth, and the fire is not quenched! It is the absolute certainty of this dreadful doom of everlasting woe, prepared of old for the punishment of carnal wickedness, that constrains me to protest with all earnestness against your committing it—which urges me to press home the words of the text, and bid you be aware and "*flee fornication.*"

The caution, as I said above, is more than justified by the frequency of the offence—it is rendered doubly necessary by the fact, that this sin, deadly as it appears in the pages of Holy Scripture, is not

regarded with due abhorrence even by those who are not guilty of it themselves—nay, it is looked upon by many, as a thing of light consequence, excusable in youth on the score of strong passions. How often, when an erring child has brought disgrace upon herself, and upon her parents, have I heard her sin spoken of as “*a misfortune.*” As if it were a mere accident; something that gave her a claim to pity instead of rebuke. As though the immediate trouble and inconvenience which it occasioned was the *only thing to be regretted.* Doubtless *that* trouble—*that* inconvenience—is in a degree to be regretted; doubtless those parents are to be pitied whose homes are embittered by the misconduct of their children. I do not at all wish to underrate the temporal affliction which, in such cases, must necessarily be felt; but, my brethren, what I most wish is, that parents would learn to view such conduct in the right light: as that which is deeply offensive to the Almighty: that they would sorrow for the *sin*, as well as for the *trouble* which it brings on them; for then, perhaps, from such affliction they would learn wisdom; they would gather from sad experience the lesson which the Bible teaches of the *importance of early piety*; they would be brought to acknowledge, that, what they so sorely regret, what so heavily op-

presses them, is but in many cases the just consequence of their own neglect.

And this, by God's blessing, would make them more careful for the future: more desirous "to train up their families in the way they ought to go:" more diligent in instructing them while young in sound religious principles: by teaching them from their very cradle, this, as the best of maxims, "to fear God, and to keep His commandments." Surely were such more generally the plan pursued; were parents to watch over their children's souls as carefully as they do over their bodies—were they to lose no opportunity of giving them or gaining for them instruction in the way of godliness—were they to check the evil which is in them whenever it appeared; rebuking every bad and indecent word that proceeded out of their mouths, foolish jesting, light, and improper talk—were they to control, and when necessary punish, their impure propensities; were they to point out, not angrily, but earnestly, the awful consequences of indulgence in forbidden lust, then it would not happen so often as it does at present, that their later years are spent in unavailing grief, and their grey hairs brought down to the grave with sorrow for the sins of some ruined child.

And now, to sum up what has been said, I have

set before you the nature of that wickedness which the text warns us to avoid; the evil consequence that follows even *now* from committing it, and the far more terrible punishment that must ensue *hereafter*. I have shown you that there is no sin more utterly at variance with our christian profession; none more hateful in the sight of God; that they who do such things have no part or inheritance in the kingdom of His beloved Son. Further, I have traced the beginning of this vice (in many cases) to the neglected education of our youths: and I have urged upon all who are present, and all who have the charge of families, the importance of attending more closely to the religious training of their children; I have begged them, as they cared for their own peace, to watch over the growth of their souls—to see that they “are taught, so soon as they shall be able to learn,” that God is a God of holiness and purity, and that He seeketh such to worship Him. That what He requires of all who have been baptized into His Church, is to forsake and renounce all carnal lusts, to crucify the flesh with its affections, to keep themselves unspotted from the world, and to follow “holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

In conclusion, I shall address to you a few words of exhortation, with a view of enforcing the command given us in the text. Such an exhortation

will naturally be directed to the younger part of those now present; and since it may happen that what is true of one, may not be true of all, I shall divide the few remarks that I have to make according to the different characters of my hearers. These may, I think, all be classed under two heads: either they are such as have kept hitherto clear of the sin of fornication, or such as having in former days been guilty of it, are now sensible of their error, and sincerely desirous to be restored to the favour of God, which by their wickedness they have forfeited.

There is indeed a third class of people; those who, though conscious of their guilt, yet persist in the practice of this sin, and are altogether reckless of the consequences: but I can scarcely suppose that any such are present here. I will not easily believe that any man is so hardened as to intrude himself as it were upon the presence of God, and to come into His holy courts, while he is living in the open and avowed practice of a crime which is denounced as deadly in His sacred word. If there be—if there be one so lost to all sense of shame, so daringly bold in wickedness as to do this, my duty is to point out publicly what I have already done in private,—that for him, while he perseveres in his iniquity, there can be no hope of mercy, but only a fearful expectation of God's judgment.

“ Marriage is honourable to all men, and the bed undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”

First, then, with respect to those who as yet have not been defiled by the sin of uncleanness. To such I say, Flee from this sin as you would from your greatest enemy. Thank God, who has kept you hitherto from falling, and use all diligence to maintain your innocence. Avoid every occasion that may in any wise lead you into bad company ; bad conversation, light songs, immodest behaviour, intemperance of every kind ; for these, my younger brethren, these are the first steps in transgression. It is by these that the mind is corrupted, and the sin, which is so deadly in its results, made to appear less serious than it really is. Flee then from these dangers—dangers which beset you on all sides, and against which you must be hourly on your guard. As you value your peace of mind—as you value God’s blessing—as you dread His displeasure—if you have any care for a parent’s happiness—any care for a good name and honest character—any care for your immortal souls, “ flee from fornication.” Keep your bodies in temperance, soberness, and chastity ; and seeing that you are not of yourselves strong enough to resist temptation,—seeing that there is in us all a corrupt heart, and evil inclination, seek continually the help

of God to support you against all the attacks of the *flesh* and of the devil. Unless you do this there is no security against a fall. And when once fallen, who can tell if you will ever rise again? The tyranny of an unclean spirit is not easily overthrown, and when once a habit of vicious living has been contracted, it is of all things most difficult to be broken through.

Therefore, while as yet you are free, use the means that are offered you for maintaining your liberty : keep watch over your hearts, over your eyes, and over your tongue, lest you be ensnared in this sin : be watchful, be diligent ; but be not over-confident : conscious of your natural weakness, have daily recourse to God, who knows what is needful for you, and who will not let you perish for lack of aid. Pray to Him as Christians are most truly bound to do—at stated times—at morning and at evening ; but most of all, pray to Him in the hour of peril, when idle companions would entice you ; when loose thoughts stir themselves within you ; hasten that moment to your refuge. Think then upon God, think what He has done for you—in creating, in redeeming you, in keeping you alive day by day : think how hateful all such impurities are in His sight, and let your conscience be consulted, and hearken to the suggestions it will surely make—
“ How can I do this great wickedness and sin

against God?" Such is my advice, my most earnest advice, to those among you who are yet innocent of the great offence named in the text.

There are others, I fear, in this congregation, who *are not* innocent: who have broken their covenant with God: have *not* kept themselves pure, but *have* been polluted with this sin: they are now, I will suppose, sensible of their misdeeds, and anxious to be restored to the love of their offended Maker: to these I say, "*Repent*, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, and so iniquity shall not be your ruin." But let your repentance be sincere: let it be the repentance spoken of by the prophet Ezekiel, in the forty-third verse of the twentieth chapter, as having such signs as these—"a remembering your ways and all your doings:"—a loathing in your own sight for all the evils that ye have committed." For it is not enough, believe me, to break off from sinning, unless you also feel sorrow and remorse for having sinned—and sorrow and remorse are bitter things: but bitter as they are, they must be endured. There can be no true repentance without them. Till a sinner feel the sting of it, he will not renounce the sin to which he is by nature inclined. Shrink not then from the work of repentance—heavy and painful as that work must be—shrink not from it, but take hold of it at once, while as yet there is time; while the

mercy of God waits for your return: only forget not that repentance itself is not wholly within your own power. God must give you grace before you can repent effectually—repent so as to obtain forgiveness—and His grace, as you know, cannot be had without prayer.

Pray, then, as indeed you have great need to do—pray God to “grant you true repentance, and His Holy Spirit,” that so you may come to have a deep and lasting sense of your transgression—may renounce and utterly forsake it, and ever hereafter serve and please Him, in newness of living and truth. Pray and faint not, and let the burden of your prayer be this: “Create in me, O Lord, a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me.”

Little Hadham.

SERMON XI.

ALL ARE ANSWERABLE.

ROMANS xiv. 12.—“ So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

THERE is much matter contained within the compass of these words, to which I am desirous of drawing your attention, after I have first observed somewhat, upon their connexion with that part of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, wherein they are found.

The church at Rome at this time was composed of persons who had originally been brought up under different systems of religion: some of them were converted Jews, and some converted heathen; and though now united, through the preaching of the Gospel, in the solemn profession of the one true faith, they yet retained many of their old marks of distinction. The Jewish Chris-

tians, as was the case with their brethren at Jerusalem, still cherished the remembrance of their ancient festivals, those holy and stated seasons which Moses had commanded them, "they observed days, and months, and times, and years." They were scrupulous about common things, especially about the use of meats; rejecting as polluted everything that had been offered as a sacrifice in an idol temple. On the other hand, the Gentile Christians treated such matters with indifference; they neither observed the Jewish feast days, nor made any distinction in articles of food. They considered that if taken moderately, and after thanksgiving, all meats were alike serviceable for their good, and might be indulged in without questioning as to the purpose for which they had first been employed. But this difference of opinion about things in themselves indifferent, had unfortunately, as is sometimes the case now, become the cause of difference and strife in the Church. The Jewish members were scandalized at what they thought too free a license, in the conduct of their Gentile fellows, while these in return mocked at the particular notions of the Jews—hence arose jealousies, and feelings of dissatisfaction; and the bond of love so much insisted on in the New Testament as the basis of all virtues, was daily in danger of being broken.

To put a stop to this evil, the Apostle in the chapter from whence the text is taken, urges upon both parties the duties of Christian forbearance. Without asserting that either side was right, he shows that both were wrong; wrong for disputing about questions of such minor importance; and he calls upon them to remember the weightier matters of their holy religion, to consider that vital Christianity does not consist in external performance,—in eating, or abstaining from certain meats and the like; but in the enjoyment of the Gospel graces, and in the practice of the Gospel virtues: “in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Further, he warns those who were contentious, and forward in condemning their brethren, to take heed lest by so doing they should seem to encroach upon the awful privileges of the Almighty. “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth,”—adding, as the strongest reason against such rash, and uncharitable censure, a declaration of that solemn account which each would have to give of his own conduct before God the Judge of all. “But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and

every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

Such appears to be the connexion of the text with the general argument in the fourteenth chapter:—a chapter which they will do well to study, who are tempted either to give, or take offence too readily in matters pertaining to religion. A chapter which, while it presents a sorrowful picture of the dissensions of the early Christians, might, without wresting its meaning at all from the truth, be made to reflect as in a mirror the likeness of the Church as it is now. But to go further into this subject, would divert me from the particular course I have proposed to myself to-day; which is to set before you, and press upon your consideration, the simple but solemn lesson which the text affords; independently of the circumstances under which it was originally written. For, my brethren, though I am not generally desirous of placing too much stress upon separate texts of Holy Scripture, without considering their bearing upon the whole argument of the context;—a practice that is often attended with danger,—yet in the present instance, the words before us contain a doctrine *so complete in itself*, and so full of valuable warning, that no risk, I think, can be incurred by such a proceeding, while, under God's blessing, some benefit may be expected from it.

Let us, then, look at the text in this light : as a statement of Holy Scripture personally addressed to every Christian hearer.—“ So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

Every word in this short sentence may with advantage be treasured up in our hearts, and may help, if duly reflected on, and digested, to increase our knowledge of the way of life, by showing us our real condition, and business in the world, and the relation in which we stand to a just but jealous God.

First, then, the Apostle says, “ Every one of us shall give an account.”—Observe how comprehensive this language is. Not only the wise, and the rich, and the learned, and the men of high station in the world, are here intended : but the poor, and ignorant, and unlearned as well—“ Every one of us”—high and low, rich and poor, one with another, have an account to give. Doubtless that account will fall heavier upon some than upon others : to whom much is given of them shall much be required. To whom the Lord has entrusted many things, of him will He ask the more. But of *all* a reckoning will be demanded : *all*, no matter what their degree and condition in this life, will have to answer in the day of judgment. Answer for what ? the Apostle tells you : *for himself*. “ Every one of us shall give account of himself.” Observe, my

brethren, Saint Paul is not content with a general declaration respecting human responsibility: he does not merely say, "Every one shall give an account:" for then there might have been a loophole for the negligent and unfaithful to escape. For instance, I can suppose such a person reasoning after this fashion—"It cannot be a great matter to me what is said in the Bible about the day of account, I am but a poor man, and have but few things committed to my care: I have neither houses nor lands, nor riches, nor worldly goods; I have no great talents to misuse: no opportunities of doing good to neglect: why, then, should I be afraid of the final reckoning? surely the just God will not look for a harvest where He has sown no seed. Surely He will not require at my hands an account like that which may well be asked of the wealthy and the great?"

To foreclose such false reasoning as this is, Saint Paul takes care to add something more particular about the account to be given. He says, "Every one of us shall give account of himself." Yes, my brethren, in this single word "*himself*," lies the real burden of your obligation,—we shall all, be our station here what it may, be our talents and opportunities ever so great, or ever so small, have to give account each *for himself*. "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that

every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." These are also St. Paul's words, and I quote them, because, not only do they confirm the statement in the text, but they enlarge upon it, and draw it out to its full meaning. They show us what that self is, for which we shall have to give account. It is made up of a soul and body, which God has committed to every man; and for the use, or abuse of which He will demand a reckoning at the last.

And is such a reckoning to be treated by any of us, as a light thing? No, surely—but as something of the deepest moment to us all. The life which we now lead in the flesh, the things that our hands find to do, the words that we now speak with our lips, the thoughts that we now conceive in our minds, these make up a large account even for the very young; an account we shall have to give before long: and to whom? for this is the third and last point in our consideration. Granted that we are liable to such a reckoning, who is it that has authority to ask it of us? Who but He that created and made us? who gave us our souls and bodies with all their wonderful faculties and powers, to be the instruments for promoting His honour, and showing forth His glory—even the Holy Lord God—who "was, and is, and is to

come." It is before Him that the examination of our lives must take place—"Every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

This last thought adds greatly to the solemn lesson which the text unfolds. God is not a man whom we may deceive: He is not as the wisest and best of human beings are, capable of being mocked and blinded by a show of godliness, without the power of it; we must not flatter ourselves that we can sin against Him and yet escape detection. "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do"—from God, not the closest secrets of our lives are hid. "He is," as the Psalmist so truly expresses it, "about our path and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways,—there is not a word in our tongue, but He knoweth it altogether." When we go out to labour in the morning, when we come in of an evening, when we are by ourselves, or in company with others; in the stillness of our chamber, or in the crowded market-place; at all times, and in all places, God is present with us, and there is nothing that we say, or do, or think, but is known unto Him. And it is to this all-seeing, all-searching Being, that we shall each of us have to give account of himself,—rather, I might say, we shall have to *hear* the account that is even now preparing against us: for God not only sees all things, but He notices all things:

there is a Book of Remembrance kept in heaven, in which the life and conversation of every child of man is written down at large : so that not the least particular of it can be forgotten. It cannot be forgotten before God, though in many cases it may have been forgotten by ourselves : but as surely as it once were done, so will it be again brought to our recollection, either to our sorrow or to our joy, in the great day of account.

Into the proceedings of that awful time I have no intention of entering this morning. Neither can it be required. There is no part of Holy Scripture so generally read, no part more sublime, and explicit, than that which relates to the final judgment. God no doubt has wisely and in mercy so ordained it, that it might not fare with this portion of His truth as it often does with the other parts of the Gospel revelation : that it might not enter into the ear and pass out again without reaching, and affecting the heart. As it is, few are so hardened, and so bold as to be able to hear, or read what is written about the judgment, without sensations of reverence, and fear. One passage only out of the many that refer to it, shall I quote : and that is, the description of the things that are to be hereafter, given by St. John in the book of the Revelation : " I saw," he says, " a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth

and the heaven fled away ; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead small and great stand before God : and the books were opened : and another book was opened, which is the book of life : and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works."

And now, brethren, let me beg of you seriously to meditate upon these truths : upon the certainty of this statement of Holy Writ—that "every one of us shall give account of himself to God." The words are few, but they are full of meaning, and that meaning has, I trust, been made clear to you all. We have looked at them piece by piece ; we have seen that we are all included in the reckoning that is to be given hereafter ; we have seen in what that reckoning will consist, that we shall have to give account, each for himself, of his life, and conduct in the world—and lastly we have considered before whom that account is to be rendered : even before God. God the Son Who died for us, Who rose again for our justification, Who now in heaven intercedes for us with the Father, will come once more in the end of the world, to be our Judge. Before Him shall we all now here present ; all who are alive, and all who are in their graves, one day stand, to give account of ourselves, and to be judged according to our works.

If you are impressed, as I wish you may be, with a conviction that this is true, the very truth of God's Holy Word; there will need no argument from me, to help you in drawing from it that conclusion, to which it so evidently points—the necessity of a religious life; the manner of persons we ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness: how careful of our steps; How watchful in all things; how zealous for God's honour; how full of charity and good deeds towards one another; how sorrowful for sin; how earnest in repentance; how persevering in the practice of a holy life; especially in seeking that help from above without which such a life must be impossible. All this would of necessity result from a heartfelt belief in, and personal application of, the words of my text. I say personal, for indeed, my brethren, this is your own concern: you have each a separate and individual interest in this consideration. Let it be seen that you so understand it; make it your business to mind the things that belong unto your eternal peace: you need not for this go beyond your proper calling: God is best served by those who abide contentedly in the position in which He has placed them. "Art thou called being a servant, care not for it:" but labour truly in that calling to do your duty; "not with eyeservices," as though you minded only to please men, "but in singleness of heart fearing

God." Art thou a master, and hast authority over others, consider the burden which this lays upon you; you have a double stewardship entrusted to you; you will have to answer at the dreadful day of judgment, not only for yourselves, but in many points for the lives and characters of those who are dependent upon you. Remember then the Apostle's counsel—"Give unto them what is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven."

In short, be our station here what it may, be it our office to minister, or to be ministered unto,—to serve or to rule. We shall be best brought by God's blessing, to fulfil its duties faithfully, by ever bearing uppermost in our thoughts that strict and solemn reckoning, that we must all render of ourselves to God. May He grant us grace to do this: may He, by His Spirit, graft into our hearts a lasting impression of our Christian responsibility: and may the same blessed Spirit which teaches us our obligation, show us how to meet it; may He guide our steps aright amidst the dangers and temptations by which we are hourly beset, so that, in the end, when called to answer at the bar of our Lord, we may not be confounded, but may give our account "with joy and not with grief;" the account of a life, passed—I do not say without sin or without reproach—but of a life spent, as far as human infirmity will admit, in striving to do our Master's

service, in striving to walk, as He walked, "by whom we have received the atonement;" in meekness, in temperance, in brotherly kindness, in patient continuance in well doing, by faith and not by sight, in favour both with God and man.

Little Hadham, April 25, 1847.

SERMON XII.

ON THE RIGHT HEARING OF THE WORD.

ACTS xxviii. 24.—“ And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.”

SUCH is the remark made by St. Luke in the last chapter of his Acts of the Apostles, upon the effect of St. Paul's preaching during his sojourn at Rome. It is a remark which occurring in the course of the narrative, might not at first sight attract any particular attention, nor seem to suggest any particular instruction. But on considering it, I think it will be found serviceable for such a purpose: capable of yielding (as indeed may be said of almost every sentence in the New Testament) matter profitable for our meditation, and adapted for our advancement in true religion.

Let me, then, my brethren, ask your attention while I endeavour to draw out and set before you, for your after reflection, and individual application, the lesson which, if I mistake not, is conveyed to us in this short verse by St. Luke, "And some believed the things which were spoken and some believed not."

And first, of the circumstances which occasioned this remark. They are related in the last chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. We there read, that when St. Paul—that persecuted but undaunted servant, and apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ—had, as a last resource under the persevering enmity to which he was exposed in Judea, asserted his privilege of Roman citizenship, and appealed to the hearing of Augustus, and in consequence had been sent from Cesarea, where he had been long "in bonds," to the imperial city, his first step, on arriving at Rome, was to call together the chief of the Jews, and to explain to them, in his open and truthful manner, the real cause of his appearance there. "And when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans : who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, be

cause there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar ; not that I had aught to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore, have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you ; because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."

To this declaration of his innocence, the Jews replied in a tone of fairness and consideration, which contrasts agreeably with the bigoted demeanour of their countrymen towards St. Paul, and his associates on many well-known occasions mentioned in the Acts. " We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came, shewed, or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest : for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against." In compliance with their desire, a day was appointed, and many of the Jews met together at the lodging of the apostle ; (for though awaiting his trial, St. Paul was not now a prisoner, but allowed to live in his own hired house with a soldier that guarded him,) and there availing himself of the opportunity thus afforded him to fulfil the mission with which his heart was full, " he expounded and testified" to the assembly " the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning

Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the Prophets, from morning till evening."

He did this, we cannot doubt it, gladly, earnestly, and impressively. He did it, because it was his bounden duty to preach Christ through evil report, and through good report. Because, to use his own language, "a necessity was laid upon him to preach the gospel." He did it, because he had his Master's words yet ringing in his ears, where-with the Lord had comforted him at the beginning of his affliction in Jerusalem; "Be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast testified of me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness of me at Rome." He did it, because in spite of all that he had suffered at the hands of the Jews, he yet yearned for the salvation of his bigoted countrymen. His heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel was, that they might be partakers with himself of the hopes and consolations of Christianity. And so he continued from morning till evening "preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ."

And what, my brethren, was the result? What was the fruit of his discourse, thus prolonged as it was, during the whole day? The text supplies the answer, "Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not."

It happened at this time,—as it had happened on

many other occasions ; as it had happened at Iconium, at Thessalonica, at Ephesus, in all which places Paul had been speaking boldly in the Lord—that his hearers were divided. While some there were, upon whom his words took such effect, that they were not able to resist them, but were convinced and converted ; there were others who kept firm to their prejudices, and remained faithless, and unbelieving.

And here let us stop for a moment, to contemplate the difference between these two classes of St. Paul's audience ; those who believed the things which were spoken, and those who continued in unbelief. For the former—those who believed—what blessedness was in store ! What joy, and peace, what comfort, and support in the knowledge which they had just received, the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, as the way, the truth, and the life ! We remember the exclamation of Andrew, and the other disciple to St. Peter, in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel—“ We have found the Messiah.” How much it was intended to convey ! And by this we may judge of the happiness of these believing Jews. They had found Him of whom Moses, and the prophets in those Scriptures which they so dearly valued, had written ; whom they had long been looking for under a false impression of His character. They had found, that Jesus of Nazareth, whom their

countrymen had crucified, was Lord, and Christ; the Anointed of God; the promised Saviour of the world. They had apprehended; taken hold of Him, and of His salvation by faith; they had but to continue in that faith; rooted and grounded; to hold it firm unto the end; framing their lives, and ruling their conduct according to its injunctions: and then there remained for them, a crown of life and glory, which Christ hath purchased for, and promised to all, who in very truth are His disciples.

But for that other class—those who believed not—those, who with the same opportunities as their brethren for learning the way of God in truth; the same opportunities for acquiring a right knowledge of the plan provided by the Almighty, for man's redemption, and an interest in the great Person by whom it had been accomplished, yet held back from receiving that knowledge—would not open their hearts to the message of the Apostle—would not allow themselves to believe that Jesus was indeed the Christ, and that no other Saviour was to be expected;—what, I ask, awaited them? Why, one of these two things—they must either at some other time have, through the Divine mercy, and grace, been led to a better mind—or they must have lived on, and at length died, in unbelief; and if in unbelief, then at enmity to, and in estrangement from, God, and objects of His severest punish-

ment ; objects of that punishment which in the Revelation is described as the second death : rather, we might call it " life in death," that state of misery in the world to come, wherein the souls and bodies of the lost, shall be tormented in the lake of fire, and which the same Holy Scripture tells us " is prepared," not only for the murderer—not only for the adulterer—not only for the idolater, and liar—but for " the fearful, and unbelieving" as well.

Think of these things, my brethren, and you will agree with me in regarding the words in my text, as words full of meaning, and instruction. Looking only to the parties about whom they were originally spoken, they have an interest for us, and for all who read the pages of the New Testament, greater than might at first appear. We cannot but feel concerned to know, that while amongst that company of Jewish leaders, collected together in the small lodging of St. Paul to hear from his lips the doctrines of the Christian faith, " some believed the things which were spoken, to the salvation of their souls,"—others " believed not ;" and while they remained in unbelief, remained shut out from the mercies of Redemption. Shut out through no indisposition of the Almighty to receive them, but through the hardness, and obstinacy of their hearts. Shut out, because they disallowed the work of God, —because they stumbled at that " chief corner-

stone elect, precious," which He had laid in Sion, and of which it had been written, that "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed."

But there is a closer interest than this to be derived from the remark of St. Luke. It is capable of application, direct personal application to ourselves; an application obvious, and easy, and one of which you will at once, I think, admit the justice, "Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not." Are not these words equally true now as when they were originally written? Is it not true that in this, and in every other congregation; every company of men gathered together (as we now are) in Christ's holy Name, and in His church, to hear His Gospel preached; there is a vast difference in the effect which that preaching has upon their minds? Like as it happened then, does it not happen still? The multitude are divided. And while part receive the word with gladness, and thankfully embrace the tidings of the Gospel, and submit themselves with all readiness to the obligation which it lays upon them, receive the Lord Jesus Christ into their hearts by a lively faith as their Saviour, their Mediator, their Master, their Example, and Guide—and, so believing, are benefited by what they hear—go away out of the assembly of His people encouraged, instructed, ani-

mated afresh with ever strengthening resolve to pursue the path which they have chosen—the narrow and strait path which the Holy Scriptures which they reverence, point out as the only course that can conduct them into their Lord's joy ;—others are of an opposite description ; are of a mind that is neither moved by the promises, nor alarmed by the threatenings of the Gospel : who, though they come, and listen, and sit before the preacher, and hear the words which he is commissioned to utter—yet regard them not, no more than if they were idle talk, or empty sounds, and who consequently return to their homes and their callings, neither amended nor improved at all.

These latter are the persons described by St. Paul in the epistle to the Hebrews, as those to whom the word spoken becomes of none effect, “ not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.” And who shall say that they do not form a large, perhaps the larger part of every Christian assembly ? I fear there can be no dispute on this point. Differing, as our congregations do, from those early attendants upon the preaching of the Apostles—seeing that we are, at least by profession, all of us already Christians—while most of them were yet unbaptized ; still, in this the resemblance is manifest : that amongst us, as amongst them, there are many gainsaying, many unbelieving hearts ; many

of whom it might be said, as it was by St. Paul, and also by our Lord before him, of the unbelieving Jews—they “hearing will not hear, seeing they will not perceive:” hearing their own character described, their own faults pointed out; seeing their own danger imaged before them, will not look upon it in that light, will not perceive the things which belong unto their peace, and why? Because “their heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts; and should be converted,” and their sins be forgiven them.

Now, if this be the case, my brethren,—if all who hear the word of God may be divided into one or other of these two classes of people, either those who believe the things which are spoken, or those who believe not,—if, as follows of necessity, the former alone are in the way of salvation,—how important is it for us to inquire to which sort we severally belong. Are we of the number of those who come together here in the house of God for the better, or for the worse? It is an inquiry that each may best follow out, if he will, separately for himself.

Only let me, in conclusion, suggest the method by which to guide ourselves in our search: and that

is, to look at the effect which the hearing of the Holy Scriptures produces upon our lives, and conversation : to see how it works in us, and influences us in our daily conduct in the world.

I shall, perhaps, be best understood by specifying particular instances. Amongst the many things spoken immediately out of the Bible, or sanctioned by its authority, there is a mention made, and repeatedly made, of the necessity of prayer. We are told to be diligent in the use of it, "to pray always," and faint not. Much, too, is said of holiness ; of that purity of heart and life which Christ requires of all who profess His religion : "None but the pure in heart shall see God." Much is spoken of the danger of intemperance of every sort and kind. Much against covetousness. Much against uncharitableness.

Many sins are set down by name, as peculiarly deadly. All sin is forbidden, as contrary to the holy law of God : as exposing those who commit it to His righteous anger. Again ; much is written about the ordinance of the Sabbath : they are said to honour God, who keep it holy : while they who profane it, are guilty of wantonly provoking Him to punish them. On these, and on a multitude of other subjects, which I need not specifically name, "which pertain to life and godliness," the word of God is sharp and clear. Those who listen to it

Sabbath after Sabbath (as many do who are now present) with attentive ears, can have little doubt as to what they ought to do, and believe to their soul's health ; and what they ought to leave undone, renounce, and abandon, in accordance with their Christian profession.

What, then, is the effect of this knowledge upon our hearts ? " Is our conversation"—by which I mean not only our language, but our whole demeanour—whole temper of mind—whole line of conduct—is this, such as becometh the hearers of the Gospel of Christ ? Do we know what it is to have the love of God, and of His dear Son our Saviour shed abroad in our heart through the operation of the Holy Spirit ? Do we wait on our Lord in prayer, in secret self-scrutinizing devotion. as well in family, as in public worship ? Is it our endeavour, is it our delight, to practise what the Gospel commands, to forsake what it forbids ? Are we conscious of having ever got the better of any evil habit marked with the brand of God's displeasure ? Are we conscious of having gone forward in the performance of any grace or duty which His word approves ?

These are questions which I would earnestly submit, my brethren, to your separate and close consideration. I know not how in any other way you can come to a right decision upon the point

proposed for your inquiry, as to whether you be of that number who really believe the things which are spoken ; or of that number who “ believe not.”

Other tests there may be, but none so safe as this. Examine yourselves, then, hereby, “ whether you be in the faith ; prove your own selves ;” and let no man deceive you with vain words. If we be, what we all should be—what we all profess to be—believers in the word of God—then must we be also “ doers ” of it. Doers, not in a spirit of self-righteousness ; not because we suppose that by so doing, we can earn for ourselves the favour and recompense of the Almighty—but because it is only through the practice of what the Holy Scriptures teach us,—through the modelling of our lives after the pattern set forth in the Gospel, that we can (with God’s help) be in any way fitted to be partakers of those holy joys which are reserved for the true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ to His kingdom in heaven.

Little Hadham, May 22nd, 1847.

SERMON XIII.

THE SUDDENNESS OF CHRIST'S COMING.

1 THESSALONIANS v. 2.—“The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.”

OF all the great truths revealed to man in the Gospel, that which perhaps affects us most, is the assurance that we shall rise again from the grave: rise again, never to die any more, but to live for ever and ever. It is this which arouses our hopes and fears, and tends to keep us stedfast in our faith, and careful in the conduct of our lives. It is a doctrine in every way adapted to our welfare; and thanks be to God, it comes to us with the strongest proofs. The very and eternal Son of God, equal to the Father in majesty and honour, came down from heaven and took upon Him our nature, in order that He might bring it to light, and establish

it securely in our hearts ; He laid down His life, that we might be pardoned, rescued from everlasting destruction ; and He took it again, after He had been three days in the heart of the earth, that we who believe in Him, might not die eternally, but have the blessed hope of rising again, and living with Him in His kingdom—" Because Christ liveth, we know that we shall live also."

Such, my brethren, is the ground of our belief in this most solemn doctrine of the resurrection : a doctrine that we find, as might be expected, made a frequent topic of discourse by the writers of the New Testament. They appeal to it as the great motive for leading a godly life ; they point it out as the crown, and completion of the Christian dispensation ; as the time when God's kingdom shall come with power. They make use of it as an argument to dissuade the sinner from his evil course, and to encourage the penitent in well-doing. It is a subject common to them all, but most prominent in the letters, and discourses of St. Paul. This great Apostle, omits no opportunity of introducing it, and drawing from it, as from a well, deep, and large, all the consolation, support, and encouragement with which it is so full. Thus, (to take a single instance,) in the chapter from which my text is taken, he writes to cheer the Thessalonian Christians, under the loss they had sustained by the death

of some of their members ;—" Brethren, I would not have you ignorant concerning them that are asleep, that ye sorrow not as others who have no hope ; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with Him." And then he goes on to predict, in a very remarkable passage, what will actually take place at the resurrection : " For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain at the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep : for the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Yes,—They shall *be* for ever with the Lord in that future glory, who were with Him by faith while in the world : but those who were *not* with Him here ; those who were His enemies by wicked works ; shall then be cast off for ever, and given over to be tormented,—of their torment, as of that glory, there shall be no end.

Such is the account which St. Paul was inspired to record of the proceedings at the resurrection : it is an account which may well create feelings of the deepest interest, and awe in all who hear it : to

those of us who have lost our friends, what solace is there in thinking that they are only taken from us for a while, and for their exceeding good ; that we shall meet them again, never (provided we be sound in our faith) to be separated more ! What blessedness in knowing that though absent “ from us in the body, they are present with us in the Lord !” One thing, indeed, might still seem wanting to complete our happiness : and that is, *the time when* : the knowledge of the day and hour when the reunion shall be accomplished.

Hearing the description given above by St. Paul, we might almost feel tempted to inquire, (as once did the Apostles of our Lord,) “ *When shall such things be, and what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the world ?*” But this knowledge is not granted to us, neither *could it be*,—“ *Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.*” Nor is it at all necessary that we should know this.—For every purpose of good, enough has been revealed ; and the exact period of the Lord’s coming has been designedly, and in mercy, hid from our eyes. “ *Of the times and seasons, brethren,*” writes the Apostle, “ ye have no need that I write unto you : for you yourselves know perfectly, that *the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.*” Observe the wisdom of these words : in-

stead of giving any encouragement to that curiosity that would look behind the veil, which God has drawn over the counsels of futurity, instead of giving a hint of the *probable* time of Christ's second appearing; St. Paul avoids this question altogether, and turns aside the attention of his hearers to a far more practical subject; to the *suddenness* with which that Advent will surprise the world. "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night, and when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction shall come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."

To know the exact hour would not make men wiser or better, in many cases it would only lead to callous indifference, or despair. But to know that whenever it comes, it *will be of a sudden*, without note or warning,—this is indeed a useful and highly salutary lesson: for why? it begets caution and diligence, lest "that day overtake us unprepared, lest while we are eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, troubled about many things, and careful only to advance our worldly fortunes, the sign of the Son of man should appear, and God rise up for judgment. At that day, come when it may, we read in the third chapter of the Second Epistle of St. Peter, "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt

with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up."

But it may be said, that though we must admit the truth of this Scripture, respecting the *suddenness* of the Lord's coming, still it may not be in our day, nor in the days of our children; that eighteen hundred years and more have passed, since the Apostle wrote his prophecy, and yet all things continue as they were; that the earth is not so old but what she can still yield her fruits, and though to her inhabitants she hath added many hundred-fold, yet hath God granted the means for their support, and with the increase of her children, multiplied her power to sustain them. And all this is true. There is no immediate sign of the dissolution of the world: nor can any one say whether it will happen in his day or a thousand years hence. But, my brethren, this makes no difference in the value of the lesson given us in the text. The *day of the Lord*, whenever it arrives, will be of a sudden, when men are off their guard: it will *come like a thief in the night*: like the flood in the days of Noah; like the fire upon unrighteous Sodom,—as Christ Himself as told us—"In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh."

But this is not all we learn from the text. The *day of the Lord* there spoken of, admits of a much closer interpretation than the one we have been

considering. It does indeed, in the largest, and most general sense, signify the day of judgment, but it also signifies and represents the conclusion of each man's life—the *day of our death*. That day is to us, for all purposes of salvation, the same as the end of the world. It matters not how long, after we are gone, God may permit the earth to endure,—to us, in our silent graves one day, and a thousand years will be the same—no length of time will alter our condition—as the tree falls so it lies : and as we die, so shall we rise for judgment,—in the same body, with the same evil habits, and the same good habits, with which we leave the world shall we have to appear before the throne of Christ at the last : to appear for which cause ? Why ? but you all must know it—to be judged according to our works—to receive for the things done in our body, whether they be good or bad.

Is it not plain, then, that the day of our departure out of this life, is, for every important effect, identical with the day of judgment ? Is it not plain to you that our account is then closed ; our day of grace past, our doom fixed, though the sentence be not yet pronounced which must decide our lot for ever ? Truly, my brethren, there is a lesson here which we cannot afford to neglect. Viewed in this light, the *day of the Lord* is ever close at hand—it may be that the Judge even now standeth at the

door—of the shortness and uncertainty of human life, I need say nothing : I leave it to your own experience,—I leave it to you who have seen your children, your relations, your neighbours, borne swiftly to their long home, to determine on how frail a thread your existence on earth depends. That thread, the most unforeseen accident may snap asunder ;—there are sicknesses, and diseases which in a few short hours can bring down the strongest to the grave. Alas ! of this truth we have had most painful proof, and that within a very little while. There are not yet three days since one of our number was called away by an almost instantaneous summons to appear before her Maker. It is but four short weeks, since a still more awful evidence of our mortality was afforded us—more awful on account of the circumstances that attended it.

And are these things which God does before our eyes to be disregarded ? No, surely they are rather to be marked, noted, and reflected upon in a spirit of holy fear : in these, and in every other instance of sudden death, there is a warning message from the Almighty : a message to remind us of the frailness of our own life—so frail and so uncertain, that not the youngest and strongest can with any confidence affirm that he will be alive on the morrow. “ O consider this ye that forget God, lest he pluck you away and there be none to de-

liver you." God in His wisdom hath hid from your sight the real hour of your death, but He has given you no license to suppose that the time is far off. That hour, when it arrives, will, as has been seen, fix your lot throughout eternity, either with the angels in heaven, or with the tortured spirits in hell.

What, then, my brethren, is the conclusion obviously to be drawn from this knowledge? Surely it is this; that we "should pass the time of our sojourning here in fear:" that we should learn so to number our days, as to apply our hearts unto true wisdom; and so be ready and prepared to lay aside the burden of the flesh, whenever our appointed time may come. And how *are* we to be in readiness? How are we to be prepared? The answer is given us in the Gospel: and it is one you must have often met with there—we must *watch* and *pray*;"—watch against the passions and evil temper, of our corrupt nature—watch against proud thoughts, and angry feelings, lest they get the mastery over us—watch against the growth of a worldly, and selfish spirit—watch against the tempter, and against every art by which he seeks to assault us from within; and watch also against his influence from without; watch against the scoffs and ridicule of the wicked and profane; watch against the force of bad example; against the en-

ticement of alluring sins. And to watchfulness we must join prayer ; else all vigilance will be in vain : we must pray to God for grace to enable us to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We must pray Him to give us strength to resist sin, whenever, and in whatever form it may assail us—we must pray without ceasing, and always in the name of the Lord Jesus ; begging God for His sake to have mercy upon us, to forgive us all that is past, and to give us both the will and the power henceforth to serve Him better.

Let us persevere, my brethren, in the practice of these great duties—duties I fear too often neglected even by those who call themselves Christians ; but never neglected without great risk to our safety : let us then persevere in them with greater strictness, and we shall assuredly derive much benefit thereby ; the more we watch over the thoughts, and intents of our hearts, the more sensible shall we become to our manifold imperfections, more awake to the attacks of our spiritual enemy ; more impressed with the guilt of sin, and more keenly desirous of that saving grace which alone can cleanse us from its pollution ; while the more fervently we intreat God for help, the more abundantly we shall receive it—the more power shall we have wherewith to oppose the evil, and to choose the good.

And thus watching and praying, habitually, and devoutly, we shall here live happy, and at rest in the station in which God has placed us, serving Him with a willing mind, and bearing patiently all that He appoints us; ever looking forward to the day of our death calmly, resignedly, nay, even joyfully. For come when it may, after length of lingering illness, or without notice or forewarning, "like a thief in the night," it will not surprise us unawares: strong in the faith of our Redeemer, at His call we shall be ready, and into His hands shall we commend our spirit, in full and fervent hope of that blessed resurrection, which in His good time He will bring to pass in our bodies. For, to the exceeding comfort of all truly humble Christians have these words been spoken—and I would that we might all lay them seriously to heart—God hath not "appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who *died* for us, that whether we wake or sleep we shall live together with Him."

Little Hadham, 1847.

SERMON XIV.

THE WORKING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND
THE MEANS WHEREBY HE WORKS.

ACTS xix. 2.—“ Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed ? ”

THE great subject of this day's solemnity is the descent of the Holy Ghost from heaven ; on this, the fiftieth day after our Lord's resurrection, and the tenth after His ascension, was that promise fulfilled, with which he had cheered the hearts of His apostles, just before He was taken from them, and received back into glory ; the promise that He would send to them the “ Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost.” On this day was that blessed Spirit revealed : made manifest to the apostles in power, and great majesty, with “ a rushing mighty wind,” and in the likeness of cloven tongues of fire which

“sat upon each of them,” as described in the epistle of the morning.

Of that mighty miracle itself, I have already spoken ; I endeavoured in my sermon this morning to set before you the real meaning of the Holy Ghost having come, and the purpose for which He was revealed ; I reserved for our present consideration, two questions intimately connected with that manifestation, and these I will now proceed to examine, viz.—

I. What is the proof by which we may ascertain, each for himself, whether we have received the Holy Ghost ?

And II. What are the sure means for obtaining so desirable, so necessary a blessing ?

I say so necessary a blessing, because unless we have received the Holy Ghost, yea, and are continually receiving Him, we can in no sort be fit partakers in the privileges of the Gospel covenant ; we are neither rightly called Christians now, nor have we any ground to think that we shall be with Christ hereafter ; “ Unless a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, He cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” “ If a man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.” Thus far we are all agreed, that the influence of the Holy Ghost is necessary to our obtaining salvation : we differ in opinion as to the effect which is produced by His

presence in the soul. Attend then, my brethren, while I submit to you, for your after meditations, some of those clear, and undoubted signs of the Spirit's presence which in the Holy Scriptures, are set down for our learning ; as tests, or marks, by which we may discover whether or not we have received the Holy Ghost.

Now the first sign of the Holy Spirit must be sought for in our heart ; the heart which is the pulse of our whole life ; that from which all we think, or say, or do, has its beginning : that, is especially the seat of the Holy Spirit's influence : there, as was foretold by the prophet Ezekiel, must the exercise of His power chiefly be witnessed. " I will give them one heart and I will put a new spirit within them ; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances and do them : and they shall be my people and I will be their God." By " a stony heart," in this description of the Spirit's influence, we understand a heart that is hard ; one that does not easily receive any impression ; one that renders its possessor indifferent to rebuke or reproof : opposed to this, is " the heart of flesh," the heart that is tender, easily affected by religious truths, quick and alive both to the promises and threatenings of the Gospel. The one is our heart as it is by

nature ; the other,—the softened and subdued heart,—is that which has undergone the renewing operation of the Holy Ghost. It is He who alone can bring to pass this alteration in us ; it is He who changes “ the hard rock into the springing well.”

Here then is one, and a very principal token by which we may arrive at what we are seeking. By our hearts, my brethren, by the thoughts, and feelings, and motives, which issue from thence, may we judge respecting this most vital question, whether or not we have received the Holy Ghost ? And if our heart condemn us not,—if, on impartial search of it, we find that we have a lively sense of God’s holy presence ; and a continual desire to please Him ; if we find that sin, though at times too strong for us, is yet hated, and resisted by our better mind ; that we have an ever-growing love of holiness, and an ever-increasing tenderness of conscience ; in a word, that our affections are drawn heavenwards, and not centered upon and absorbed in the cares and business of this life ; then may we without presumption believe, that we have tasted of the good gifts of God, have received His Holy Spirit ; are no longer carnally-minded, (which is a state of death,) but are in very truth alive unto God : and if alive unto God, then meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

But to give a second proof, and one by which the

foregoing may be confirmed. The heart, we are told in the Scriptures, (and we know it from sad experience,) is deceitful above all things; we cannot rely on it alone, for a token of our being alive unto God through the influence of the Holy Spirit: indeed, we often see men miserably mistaken from this very error: because they are content with their inward feelings—their religious impressions alone—they would tell you, (were you to speak with them on this subject,) “that their heart is in the right place, that they have no doubt their salvation:” “that nothing shall separate them from the love of Christ;” while at the same time they are not always careful to show their love in the right way; by the *sobriety* and *holiness of their lives*. And yet it is here, my brethren, that the surest evidence of the Holy Spirit’s power is to be looked for; *in our words—and in our works*: by these a man is known as surely as a tree is known by its fruit—“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.”

And how is it with ourselves as to these two points? What token do we give of the Spirit’s presence *by our words*? Alas! I fear that we often testify against ourselves that we have not received Him; we often prove, by our hasty, our angry, our

unkind expressions ; to say nothing of profane and impious conversation ; that we are unsanctified in heart ; that we are very far from having attained to that purity of speech, which becometh Christians, and which is required of us by our Lord. Remember how strongly He condemned the use of violent and improper language—"I say unto you let your communication be yea, yea, nay, nay, for whatsoever be more than these cometh of evil."

Again ; and this is the last mark I shall bring forward this afternoon,—the evidence of the Holy Spirit must be sought for *in our actions*. Though our language be ever so good, yet if our actions contradict our words, our words themselves will soon be thought hollow and untrue ; and we shall be exposed to the censure addressed by St. Paul to those, "who professing to know God yet in works denied Him ;" but it cannot so happen with our actions ; they are a sure testimony to which our conscience may appeal : at any rate the risk of being deceived in them is far less than in our words : if they are of a kind such as God's word enjoins ; if they are done in the spirit of His holy fear ; then may we hope that the source from whence they spring is the right one ; that the Spirit of God dwelleth in us, and that "he doeth the works."

I have now produced three tests, or marks, by

which we may try, each for himself, whether we have received the Holy Ghost: these marks are, I. The state of our hearts: II. The tone of our conversation: III. The general conduct of our lives.

Examine yourselves, my brethren, in all these three particulars, before you attempt to answer the question proposed in the text; examine your hearts narrowly and impartially; search out your spirits, search, and see, whether you are conscious of loving God, more than you love the things of this present world, and of fearing God more than you fear your fellow men: when I say we are to search and inquire whether we love God first and before all things, do not suppose that such love is inconsistent with, or excludes the love that we owe to one another; on the contrary, the love of God and the love of our neighbour spring from one and the same source; they are both shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost; we cannot love the one and hate the other: we cannot have any true piety, any lively feeling of devotion towards our Maker, so long as we harbour ill-will and animosity towards our brethren.

Search for the Spirit then in the feelings which animate your hearts,—feelings of love both towards God, and towards men. Search for Him also in that which proceeds out of the abundance of the

heart : in the words that you speak, in your daily, hourly conversation ; watch the door of your lips, see if that which issues from them be clean, sanctified, and fit for the Master's use. Lastly, if you would understand the true state of your souls, look for the mark of the Holy Spirit in the improved course of your lives : examine what progress you are making in godliness, what ground you have gained upon your sins, what conquest you have obtained over your evil tempers ; what bad habits you have broken off ; what better practice you have begun ; how far you have got rid of, are disentangled from your former conversation ; from the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts ; in what measure you have " put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness : " in other words, mark well how many of these works, *not* of the Spirit, but of the flesh, you have put off, " anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, evil communication, fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, envyings, drunkenness," and the like ; and how many of these you have put on in their stead—put on as men who possess the knowledge of the true God are called upon to do—" bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, faith, meekness, temperance, charity," and a peaceable disposition towards all : *these* are the true

fruits of the blessed Spirit, and when they are wanting we are nothing.

Let no man deceive you, my brethren, on so important a question as this is; we cannot please God unless we have His Holy Spirit, and there is no proof of our having received that Spirit unless we walk according to the law of the Spirit. It is not the boasting of His presence, it is not the confident assertion that we are sealed by Him to the day of redemption, that we can trust to, as an infallible security, that we are so blessed. No; the sign of our deliverance from the bondage of our carnal nature, the true mark of the Holy Ghost's dwelling in us, will be seen in this, in every instance that we give of subdued lust, or conquered passion, in every humble, lowly thought of our own unworthiness; in every pang that we feel for our sins; in every yearning of our hearts towards God, and in every act of our daily duty honestly and cheerfully performed.

Having said thus much upon the marks of the Holy Spirit's presence; having urged upon you the importance of inquiring whether such tokens are to be found in yourselves; I will now go on to add a few remarks upon the second point I purposed to consider, viz. the *means* by which the Holy Spirit's aid is to be sought for and secured.

Those means (I speak of the ordinary and acknowledged means of grace) are chiefly these—prayer—reading and hearing the Holy Scriptures—the holy sacraments of the Christian Church : these are the usual channels through, and by which the Holy Spirit works His work of mercy in converting the soul ; and to these you have all free access ; they are the instruments which God puts into your hands, to enable you to draw down His Holy Spirit upon your hearts, and therefore if your conscience tells you that you are yet without the Comforter, the fault must rest with yourselves. Either you have neglected prayer ; and how many are chargeable with this grievous error ! or you have not opened your Bible ; or you have not set sufficient store by those two holy ordinances of our religion, baptism, and the supper of the Lord. Till your practice in all these respects be altered, you cannot wonder that you are left disconsolate ; you cannot be surprised if God withhold his best and most precious gift from those who are at no pains to seek it from Him faithfully. “ Ask and you shall have, knock and it shall be opened unto you,” is the promise made to us by Christ in the Gospel, and we know that His promise is sure. But if we will *not* ask, if we will *not* knock, if we know nothing of the blessedness of regular and earnest prayer, then is the promise made of none effect

Say not, my brethren, that you desire to pray, but know not how; say not that you are ignorant, and so cannot pray. Do not seek to excuse your negligence by such pretence as this; but rather set yourselves in earnest to learn: do as David did: fall low on your knees before the throne of the Almighty; lift up your hands to God, and then your voice will not long be dumb; the Spirit Himself will help your infirmities, and will teach you how to pray aright for His succour.

To conclude: let me, then, exhort you, my brethren, as you care to obtain the blessed aid of the Holy Spirit, to be diligent in the exercise of prayer: and let your foremost petition ever be this, "that God would give you grace to know what things you ought to do, and power faithfully to perform the same." But do not stop here: do not neglect the other means of grace. Be attentive to the study of the Holy Scriptures: read, mark, learn its wholesome lessons: listen to them, not as many do, without caring to understand them, without considering what they teach; but listen with the earnestness of men who know their value, who know that the Bible contains the word of God: His very voice speaking by the mouth of His holy prophets, evangelists, and apostles. Listen with your hearts as well as with your ears, and you will soon find great comfort and support from its sacred

pages—you will find this to be a true saying of St. Paul's in his second epistle to Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"—able to make you "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Lastly. Make a due and reverent use of Christ's holy sacraments. There are no greater means of grace than these: and none so little regarded. When I say this, I speak particularly of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. That of Holy Baptism has not yet, thanks be to God, fallen into disuse. Yet surely it is strange, strange to a degree almost unaccountable, that the same persons who observe the one sacrament, scruple not to neglect the other! Were they not both, let me ask you, were they not both ordained by Christ Himself? Are they not *both* generally necessary to salvation? Indeed, my brethren, you can scarcely be aware how great an hindrance you throw in the way of your salvation, by continuing year after year to absent yourselves from the Lord's table. You thus deprive yourselves wilfully of that spiritual sustenance which you so much need to keep you from sinking under the load of earthly cares and earthly troubles by which, I well know, your lot at present is beset.

Would that I could bring you to see this holy ordinance in its proper light! would that I could make you understand that the sacrament is not a thing to be put off till old age, and then taken as a charm to smoothe the rugged path of death—but a thing for *present use* and observance; an act of faith which every mature Christian is bound to render to his Lord; an act of faith, which almost more than any other is calculated to advance our progress in true religion; because it brings before us in the liveliest manner the sacrifice of our great Redeemer; because, under the symbols of bread and wine, “Jesus Christ is evidently set forth ~~en~~cified amongst us.” Surely, my brethren, it is against all reason that we cheer our souls with the hope of being saved from eternal death, through the merits of that mighty Saviour, so long as we are bold enough to refuse obedience to His most express commands. So long as, though bidden ever so lovingly, we cast His words behind us, and *will not do this in remembrance of Him.*

Consider, I beseech you, what I have been saying: remember, that if you really desire the renewing influences of the Holy Ghost, you must look for Him in the way in which He is promised: in those means of grace just enumerated: in prayer: in reading and hearing the Bible: and in the holy sacraments. You must look for Him in the use, not of *one only*, but of *all*.

Take them all three together ; *prayer* uttered in the spirit of earnest supplication ; *the words which God addresses to you in the Bible : The bread of life, and the cup of salvation*, which Christ has prepared for you at His table : put their value to the test by a *sincere*, and *devout*, and *frequent* use of them ; and in due time you will reap the benefit of such a practice. You will be able at length to answer with humble but heartfelt confidence, the question in the text—you will be able to say, Blessed be God, we *have* received the Holy Ghost.

*Little Hadham,
Whitsunday, 1847, May 31.*

•

SERMON XV.

ON THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

ST. JOHN vi. 67.—“ Jesus said unto the twelve, Will ye also go away ?”

SUCH were the words addressed by our Lord to His apostles at the conclusion of that memorable discourse recorded at length in the sixth chapter of St. John. The object of that discourse seems to have been to set forth more clearly than had yet been done, the great doctrine of the efficacy of Christ's atonement;—the doctrine that no man ever was, or could be, accepted with God, but in, and through the propitiation and satisfaction made by the offering up of the body and blood of His own beloved Son upon the cross.

This was a subject, then, new to the Jews, and many were offended at it. When Jesus spake of

Himself as the "bread of life"—the "bread that came down from heaven;" and declared that bread to be His "flesh," which "He would give for the life of the world;" and further, that by eating of His flesh, and drinking of His blood, mankind were to be saved, and obtain eternal life—the greater part of His hearers were perplexed, and at a loss to understand His meaning: they strove among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" They were so dull of heart that they interpreted in a strictly literal manner what Jesus had spoken in a figure. And though our Lord intimated to them the cause of their error, and gave them to understand that His words were to be taken spiritually—"It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life"—yet for all this, "many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." Whereupon our Saviour turning to those chosen few, on whose faith, and constancy so much depended; those twelve apostles who—with one sorrowful exception—were to be His witnesses to the world, the builders up of His church among men, put to them this short but affecting question: "Will ye also go away?" To which Peter instantly replied as spokesman on behalf of the rest of his companions, in language of the warmest zeal—language which

showed that he at least had not misunderstood his Master's meaning, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

It is not my intention to make any remark upon this answer of the Apostle, fervent and expressive as his words are, and useful at all times for our meditation, as conveying within a short compass, the substance of our Christian faith: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." I would rather this morning direct your thoughts to another subject; a subject, indeed, of scarcely less importance, and one that closely concerns your everlasting salvation—a subject on which I have spoken to you before, but which, owing to the little effect my treating of it has yet produced, appears to require a repetition. I allude to our very general neglect of the most holy ordinance, and comfortable means of grace—the *Lord's Supper*. May God grant, that the remarks I am now once more (by His permission) about to make on this sacrament, upon its origin and first appointment; upon our obligation often, and thankfully to receive it, and upon the preparation necessary for receiving it worthily, may sink down into your hearts, and bring about an alteration—if not immediately, yet at a very early opportunity—in your practice regarding it.

Would, my Christian friends, that you may be enabled to perceive, and know what is your duty in this matter, and also to fulfil the same, that so the reproach of the cross, on this score at least, may cease; and the words of our Lord in the text, "Will ye also go away?" be no longer applicable as they now are, to by far the greater part of this congregation, so often as they are bidden in Christ's name to be partakers of the Holy Communion.

Now, with the first appointment of the Lord's Supper, and the purpose of it, we are made acquainted in the twenty-sixth chapter of St. Matthew, and in the corresponding chapters of St. Mark's and St. Luke's gospels. There we read how the Lord Jesus, at the very last meal of which he partook with His Apostles, previous to His crucifixion, in the same night in which He was betrayed, "took bread" from off the table at which they were sitting, "and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me." After the same manner also "He took the cup," when He had supped, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

Such was the institution of the Holy Sacrament—

a sacrament designed not for the use and comfort of the Apostles alone, but like every other thing that Jesus spake, and did, intended for the use, and comfort of all who should hereafter believe on Him through their words. It was designed, first of all, to keep up a perpetual remembrance of His death until His coming again. For, as St. Paul tells us, "As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we do show forth the Lord's death till He come."

Further, it was designed to convey to all who should rightly receive it, the benefits of that His most precious death. It was designed to be an especial means of grace—perhaps the greatest of all—for obtaining to our souls that strength, and support, that inward, and spiritual nourishment, which is so necessary in order to keep us stedfast in our faith, to enable us to grow up to Christ in all things, who is our Head: "from which the whole body or church, by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together increaseth with the increase of God."

Another great purpose of the holy sacrament was, as I may have observed to you before, to serve as a bond of union amongst believers, a bond of union for everything good, and pure, and lovely; and a bond of union against all unrighteousness. This was the light in which the early Christians re-

garded this sacred rite. They, when they gathered round the Lord's table, and with feelings of mutual fellowship, and good-will partook of that heavenly banquet, looked upon themselves as pledged by that act to do no wrong to any man ; to smother into forgetfulness every injury that they had received ; to bear no malice nor hatred in their hearts, but to emulate one another in deeds of piety and kindness—"to provoke unto love and good works." And this they did, because they had respect to the closeness of their relationship in Christ ; because they felt the force of their Saviour's words : "One is your Master, and ye are all brethren."

Here, then, are three great objects for which, as I have shown you, the Holy Communion was ordained. First, for the remembering the Lord's most precious death. Secondly, for conveying His Spirit to our souls : and thirdly, for promoting unity, peace, and concord amongst the several members of His body.

We now come to consider the obligation by which we are bound to receive this Holy Sacrament. And this I might ground on the single fact, that it is expressly commanded us in the Gospel ; "This do," are our Lord's own words, "in remembrance of me." To every well-regulated mind, this alone should be sufficient. When Christ the Lord gives so distinct,

so emphatic an order, we cannot be His true disciples if we hesitate to obey: if we love Him we *must* keep His commandments.

But, then, besides that we have this as a commandment from Him, are there not additional reasons why we should be diligent and constant in our use of this holy institution? reasons which are suggested by the considerations into which we have already gone respecting its origin, and design? A moment's thought will convince you that there are. Can it—I would have you ask yourselves—can it be a question with any of us, whether we would cherish the recollection of the death and sufferings of our blessed Lord as a stimulus to our faith and love, or let the memory of them grow cold and die away in our hearts, till at length we cease to be affected with any lively sense of the Redemption, which those sufferings have wrought out for us? Can it be a question whether we would have His grace dwelling in our souls, as an everspringing well of life and holiness, or be left to ourselves, to the corruption of our evil nature, an easy prey to that rebellious and wicked spirit, who is always on the watch for our destruction? Or lastly, can it be a question, whether peace, and harmony, united affections, unselfish aims, general charity and consideration for one another, are not of all things most to be desired and sought after: and discord, disunion,

selfishness, and indifference, most to be avoided and eschewed ?

If there be but one opinion on all these points, if we are agreed upon the excellence, and advantage—yes, and the necessity of a certain line of conduct ; why are we not also agreed upon pursuing it ? Why is it, that when Christ calls us by His ministers to come to His holy table, in order to prove our faith in His atonement, and to remember His exceeding love in dying for us ; when He promises to meet us there, and make us glad with the light of His countenance, and impart to us His Holy Spirit, and all other benefits which He hath obtained for us,—why is it, I ask, that so many turn a deaf ear to the invitation, and scruple not to disregard the blessing thus graciously offered them ?

Surely, my brethren, ye are not aware how unkind and grievous a thing it is, thus continually to reject so holy an ordinance. To use the language of the Exhortation in our Prayer Book, “ Are ye not ashamed when God calleth you, to say that ye will not come ? ” Does it never strike you, when you leave the church on sacrament days, after the sermon, while the service is yet incomplete, while the greatest act of Christian worship is still unperformed, that you are, as it were, deserting your post, that you are leaving Christ and His cross, to get back more quickly to the world,—the world which

is at enmity with Him ? With some of you, I verily believe this to be the case ; I would believe that in some of your breasts there is a struggle, perhaps only momentary ; but yet a struggle between staying and departing ; a struggle in which the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Would that in such circumstances, the sentence in the text might occur to decide the balance ! Would that as many of you as are of two minds on so important a matter, might have your wills directed into the right choice through the recollection of these your Saviour's words, " Will ye also go away ? "

But perhaps you will allege that you are not ready : that you have no disinclination to accept the Lord's mercies : but that you do not feel yourselves in a fit condition to communicate : and this brings me to a few remarks upon the last part proposed for our consideration, namely, the fit and necessary preparation for the worthy receiving of the Holy Supper.

This preparation consists, not so much in any outward acts of studied devotion ; not so much in going through a certain course of religious exercises—though these things are not to be neglected, and are great helps towards promoting in us thoughts and feelings suitable to so solemn an occasion—but rather in that habitual government of the heart ; that training of every wish, and regulating every

action, by the law of the Gospel, which is required of us as Christians. It is this, which will render a man at all times fit to partake of the Lord's Supper—yes—and at all times desirous of so doing. And no wonder; the more we accustom ourselves to such a practice, the more we exercise ourselves in the discipline of the Gospel; trying our conduct, and our very motives by its wholesome counsels; the more keenly shall we be made to feel our own sinfulness, and the need we have of Divine grace to keep us from falling into utter condemnation; convinced of sin, we shall also see the necessity of a Saviour from its defilement. "Cleanse thou me from my secret faults, and renew a right spirit within me," will be our silent, as well as our uttered prayer; and if such be our conviction, and such our desires, where shall we better seek the Lord, and His strength, than in His own appointed way; in, and through His holy ordinance, in which He promises His presence and heavenly benediction?

Beware then, my brethren, how you refuse to come to the Lord's Supper on the plea of unworthiness. It is *willingness*, rather than worthiness, which is requisite; for *worthy* we can never be—no, not the best of us—even to gather up the crumbs that fall from our Master's table. If you be truly sensible of the burden of your sins; if you do earnestly repent of them, and by God's help resolve to

forsake them ; if for the future, you intend to live a better and a holier life ; if you have no uncharitable feelings in your hearts, but are in love, and peace with one another ; then assuredly you are in a condition to partake of this most comfortable Sacrament. By keeping back, you misunderstand the merciful institution of your Lord ; you make that a stumbling-block and a hindrance, which Christ designed for the support and encouragement of His people.

Still, it may be asked, is there to be no distinction ? Are all, without respect of persons, invited to that Feast, notwithstanding what St. Paul writes of the danger of eating, and drinking thereof to our own condemnation ? No ; surely, there is unworthiness which does indeed unfit a man for communicating : there is a state of heart, and a state of life, in which to approach the Lord's table would be an act of daring impiety. " If any man be a blasphemer of God, a hinderer or slanderer of His word, an adulterer, in malice, and envy, or in any other grievous crime," that man, before he has heartily repented and renounced his sin, may not come. But what an awful condition is this ! To be unfit to approach that Saviour who alone can take away sin !

Should there be one here who has so far forgotten God, so deeply transgressed His holy command-

ments, let him consider well what I am saying : unfitness like his implies unfitness for many things besides the Sacrament ; it implies unfitness for prayer ; unfitness for praising God ; unfitness for addressing Him as “ our Father ” who is in heaven : above all, unfitness to stand before His throne ; unfitness for death and judgment. Our conscience will witness against us that this is true ; so long as we are living in the indulgence of any allowed sin, we must be well aware that we are not walking so as to please God : that if our life were required of us this night, it must go hard with our souls. We cannot but confess that we are in peril—hourly peril—of everlasting condemnation. Why then not hasten while as yet it is possible to escape destruction ? Why not break off at once our transgressions, and turn unto the Lord our God, so that iniquity may not be our ruin ? Why wait, against warning, and against conscience, till the day of grace be past for ever, and God arise up to correct us with judgment, and in His anger ?

Little Hadham.

SERMON XVI.

ON THE HISTORY OF ELI.

1 SAMUEL iii. 11, 12, 13.—“ And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house ; when I begin I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth ; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.”

WE have, in these words, the severe sentence pronounced by the Almighty against Eli ; and also the reason and cause of that fearful judgment. It is a sentence of utter desolation, misery, and ruin, upon himself, upon his children, and upon his children's children : “ I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth ;” and then the reason immediately follows, “ Because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.”

Who can read this announcement of the Almighty's vengeance against a particular individual and his family without mingled feelings of pity, and of awe? Knowing that God is a God of mercy, and long-suffering, of great kindness, one that repenteth of the evil; must we not think that when He appears to act in a contrary direction to these his usual attributes, it is for a just and sufficient cause? It is because the sin which he so visits is very grievous, and the warning which its punishment proclaims, one very necessary for our use? And such, no doubt, we shall find to be the case, on looking into the history of Eli, and the afflictions in which he was involved. That history is to be sought for in the first four chapters of the first book of Samuel, two of which (the second and the third) are appointed for the lessons of this day's service. From them we learn all that is known of Eli, and of his house; but that knowledge is amply sufficient to vindicate the dealings of the Almighty with his creatures; amply sufficient to show that God is just in all His ways, and holy in all His works—that He is a God of patience and of mercy, but yet one who will by no means spare the guilty.

The first mention made of Eli is in the ninth verse of the first chapter, where he is described as sitting "upon a seat by a post of the temple of the Lord." He was sitting there, according to the

custom of the priestly office, to regulate the order of the service, and to give counsel, and advice to all who came to inquire of him.

I pass over his interview with Hannah, both before, and after the birth of Samuel. Beautiful as her story is, and fruitful with instruction, I must not enter upon it now. Besides it is familiar to you all. You all know how God mercifully hearkened to her prayer, and took away her reproach among women. He gave her a man-child; and that child, according to her vow, she lent unto the Lord; that is to say, she set him apart for the service of the ministry; she brought him up unto Jerusalem, so soon as he was weaned, and left him there in the temple—her first born and at that time her only child—to abide for ever in attendance upon the worship of the Lord: she left him in the charge of Eli, on whom he seems to have waited, and before whom he ministered unto the Lord.

What part Samuel had to take in the affliction of Eli will appear by and bye. We must first recur to the account of Eli's sons' misconduct, as related in the second chapter. It appears from what is seen in the fifteenth and sixteenth verses, that they were also priests, and that they abused the privileges of their order; and exacted more than was due from the sacrifices of beasts, which were offered continually, according to the Mosaic law. They were

covetous, and violent, and what is worse they were given to filthy lusts :—" They lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." By such proceedings, they brought great scandal upon their religion, insomuch that " men abhorred the offering of the Lord," on account of the wicked lives of those whose office it was to present it. Their sin was great ; and when it came to Eli's ears, he rebuked them for it ; but far too leniently, considering the aggravated character of their crime : he said unto them, " Why do ye such things ? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons ; for it is no good report that I hear ; ye make the Lord's people to transgress."

Such gentle exhortation was ill suited for such sinners as these were : besides it came too late. Eli, the judge of Israel, the highest in authority over God's people upon earth, ought surely to have set an example of godly living in his own house ; ought surely to have been foremost in accusing, and punishing his guilty children ; and not waited till their enormities were so notorious, " that he heard of their evil dealings from all people." No wonder that his tardy reproof was ineffectual—no wonder that they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, after he had so long in silence passed over their iniquities.

But, my brethren, though Eli, through mistaken fondness, had spared to correct his sons, they were not therefore to go unpunished. The cry of their offences had gone up to heaven, and God himself arose to judgment, to avenge the insults which their impiety had cast upon His worship.

A divinely-inspired prophet—a man of God—was sent by Him to Eli with this message,—“ Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt, in Pharaoh’s house, and did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me ? And did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel ? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering which I have commanded in my habitation ; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people ? Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father should walk before me for ever : but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me ; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold the days come that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father’s house ;” . . . “ and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever.” And then He goes on at the

thirty-fourth verse,—“ And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die, both of them. And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house: and he shall walk before mine Anointed for ever. And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me I pray thee into one of the priest's offices, that I may eat a piece of bread.”

Such was the doom that God by his prophet pronounced upon the family of Eli. Beggary, death, and desolation, such was the recompense of that vileness which had been permitted to go unrestrained. It was a terrible, overwhelming decree; and it was strictly, and literally accomplished.

Before, however, this took place, God a second time made it known to Eli. He made it known to him by the mouth of Samuel, with circumstances of peculiar solemnity, and in those words which I have taken for my text. “ And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin I will also make an end.

For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

With regard to the second announcement of the affliction that was to come upon him, two things may be observed: first, that it made doubly sure the certainty of God's visitation: and secondly, that it called forth from Eli, that memorable expression of his faith and resignation, which makes him an object for our imitation. When Samuel revealed to him what God had spoken, and when he "had told him every whit and hid nothing from him;" Eli exclaimed, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good."

There remains but one other scene in Eli's history to be described; and that is his end; which is related in the fourth chapter, from the tenth to the eighteenth verses. In it we see the accomplishment of the greater part of what God had pronounced against him. The Philistines, their most inveterate enemies, had been permitted to prevail over Israel, and had smitten them with a very great slaughter; the ark moreover—that sacred symbol of God's perpetual presence—overlaid about with gold—wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant—the laws written with His own finger—

the ark of the testimony of the Lord—which in their defence was carried out to battle,—had been taken; and the two sons of Eli (who in their capacity of priests were with it to guard it) were slain. These sad tidings were brought by a messenger, that self-same day from out of the army, to Shiloh, where Eli dwelt. He was then in extreme old age, “ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see.” But the noise of lamentation, caused by the news of the defeat, came up into his ears; and he asked what it meant? “And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines; and there hath also been a great slaughter among the people; and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken.” These last words gave the death-blow to the ancient judge. He had heard with patience the slaughter of his sons, and of his people; hard as was the trial, he had borne up against it: but when mention was made of the ark of God—when its loss was told him—then he failed—he fell off the seat backward, by the side of the gate; and his neck brake, and he died; for he was an old man and heavy: and he had judged Israel forty years.

Such is a short sketch of the history of Eli, and the calamity which God brought upon him. From it we gather that he was, what, in common speech,

would be called a good, and religious man : high in office over God's people, and entrusted with intimations of His divine will ; a man, too, of deep personal humility ; patient, and resigned under the announcement of the ruin of his house ; and in the manner of his death giving an affecting proof of piety and devotion to his God. In all these respects he stands before us, an object for our reverence, and love. But in one particular part of his duty he was wanting—namely, in his duty towards his children. There he failed—and how many thousands have failed in the same way since his day ! Through mistaken indulgence, through an over easiness of temperament, which would not allow him to use sufficient severity in the correction of their faults—“ His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.” Not that he sanctioned their wickedness—not that he was blind to the consequences of it, for we read how he rebuked them and pointed out to them their folly, saying, “ If one man sin against another the judge shall judge him ; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him ?” But the mischief lay in this ; that he did not restrain them betimes ; he did not exercise his just authority as a father in disciplining his sons when young, and so, when they came to riper age, they were beyond the reach of his control—“ they would have none

of his counsel, nor hearken at all to his reproofs,"—their sins cried to God for punishment—and in that punishment was involved, not themselves only, but their father and their wives, and their little ones, and their whole posterity for ever.

It will not require many words to make the application of this history to ourselves. In it there is a lesson—a lesson traced by the finger of the Almighty—and in characters so plain that none can fail to understand it: a lesson useful to us all, but more especially suitable for *parents*—and that is, a lesson to beware of over indulgence; to beware of saving our own feelings, at the expense of ruining our children—ruining them for want of timely restraint.

A spoilt child is a trouble to itself, to its parents, and to all within its reach. It is spoilt for this world; and what is far worse, it is spoilt, in many cases, for heaven. Yes, my brethren, Scripture and reason alike require of you to restrain your children from following their own wills, and humours, and to punish them when punishment is necessary. To punish them—not in anger—not with undue hardness—but at proper times, and for proper causes.

It is for your interest so to do: there is no sorer sight than that of old age made wretched by the misconduct of unruly children. It is a sight, alas! but too common; because men will not be guided

by others in the management of their children ; they will not be counselled, either by what they find written in the word of God, or by what they see in the world. They will wait till experience—bitter experience teaches them how true it is, that tempers unrebuked in youth become ungovernable in manhood—that “ foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child,” and to neglect to drive it out by wise treatment, and salutary correction, is to heap up sorrow against a later day—is to expose themselves and their offspring “ to tribulation, and anguish, and woe.”

Let it not be so with you ; but rather “ give all diligence,” to avail yourselves both of example and of advice, for the proper treatment of your children. Especially be forward to take all the help which God’s holy book supplies towards the fulfilling of so anxious and so responsible a duty. Read in that book, and mark well, and digest what is written concerning Abraham, the Father of the Faithful ; whom the Almighty honoured above all of his time, because (as we see in the eighteenth chapter of Genesis) God knew “ that he would ” command his children, and his household after him, “ that they should keep the way of the Lord, and do justice, and keep judgment,” so that all He had promised might be accomplished in his race. Read of his prosperity in life, and his happiness in death ; how

he “died in a good old age, an old man and full of years; and was gathered to his people,”—attended by both his sons, Ishmael and Isaac, to the grave. Read, I say, of him, and compare with his lot that of Eli—dishonoured in his old age, and visited with the direst affliction; solely for having neglected that for which Abraham was blessed; for having neglected to order his children and household to keep the way of the Lord—“because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.”

Read of him, and be warned by his example. Do not suppose that it is enough to serve God yourselves: let us not think that all that can be required towards attaining salvation through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is to shape *our* course according to the Gospel, to keep *our own souls* diligently by its precepts: no—we must indeed seek to do this; but we must do more withal: we must serve God with *our whole house*; we must walk in His way ourselves, and take all the care we can that our families, our sons and our daughters,—yes, and our men-servants and maid-servants, walk in that way as well. And how can we expect that this will be the case, unless we bring them up betimes, “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?” Unless in their tender years, while their minds are soft, and pliant, we endeavour to counter-

act their evil tendencies and humours, and to instil into them sound principles and sober habits—in short, unless we endeavour to bring them up as Christian children ought always to be brought up, virtuously, religiously, and in the fear of God ?

An education like this, our children, as beings born for immortality, claim at our hands ; and on us will be visited the evil that may arise for lack of it—and justly too—for in a christian land, with a christian church, and christian schools, close at our doors, what possible excuse can there be for any one, if he or his children go astray, in ignorance of the one true God, and of Jesus Christ whom He hath sent ? There is no one so poor that he cannot, if he will, obtain for his children the knowledge necessary to their salvation. Besides, after all, the most important part of their education rests in your own hands. There is no teaching nearly so effectual as the teaching of example. In religious teaching, this is far above all others in value : and what example, I would ask you—what example has half such weight with a child as the example of its parents ?

Bear this in mind, I beseech you, for it is the key that opens the door to true wisdom, the readiest path to all right learning. By your constant and early attention to the temper and disposition of

your children ; by a due mixture of encouragement and correction—correction not in anger, but in love ; by losing no opportunity of imparting to them sound religious knowledge ; by conveying it yourselves, or seeking it from those more capable of imparting it ; line upon line, and precept upon precept ; here a little and there a little : above all, by your own conduct and conversation, which they shall daily behold, do you show yourselves faithful to the solemn trust which God has committed to your charge.

Do your part to train up your sons and your daughters in the way wherein they ought to go, and then, when they are old, they will not depart from it : they will not, as did Eli's sons, by a course of hardened crime, bring a judgment out of heaven upon themselves, nor weigh down your grey hairs with sorrow to an untimely end ;—no—but instead of a curse, they will prove a blessing. It cannot be but that your children, thus religiously educated, will (as a general rule) pay back with interest all the care and anxiety you have expended on them : they will be dutiful, loving, and obedient to you in all things ; they will be your comfort in declining age ; they will sooth you on the bed of death—yes—and they will be your crown of rejoicing in the day of judgment. United with them, in humble reliance on the Redeemer's merits, you

will say as you stand in meekness before the throne, "Behold I and the children whom thou hast given me," of those whom thou hast given me I have lost none.

Little Hadham.

SERMON XVII.

FAREWELL SERMON.

HEBREWS xiii. 17.—“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves : for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account ; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief.”

THE subject which these words, my brethren, bring before our minds is full of importance. It is the duty of a Christian minister towards his flock, and the corresponding duty of the flock towards their minister,—a subject at all times interesting, at all times capable of yielding profitable instruction ; but which at this present moment seems to me to be doubly so, when that connexion which for the last three years and more, has united us together, is about to be broken off.

Let me, then, my brethren, ask your attention,—

•

that attention which has hitherto been readily given, while I set before you to the best of my power, what the teaching of Holy Scripture is, upon the point proposed for our consideration in the text: and may God grant that the remarks I am about to make, may (as far as they are suitable to His holy word) be blessed to the promoting of His glory, and to the furtherance of that end which while here I have had constantly in view,—the salvation of your immortal souls through the method marked out in the Gospel.

First, of our two points is our inquiry, of the duty of a Christian minister towards his flock. What is meant by a Christian minister? And what is that which he has appointed him to do?

By a Christian minister, I mean one who after the order set down in the New Testament, has been lawfully called and sent to labour in the Gospel field: one who, (as our Prayer Book teaches us in the Ordination Service,) after examination had, to see if he be duly qualified, has been publicly appointed, and set apart for so holy an office, by public prayer, and the laying on of the hands of the elders and chief rulers in the Church.

Such was the manner in which Christ's ministers received their commission, at the very beginning of Christianity. The apostles appointed a bishop, chief pastor, or overseer, in every place, where there

•

was a sufficient number of believers ; and gave him power to ordain other ministers under him. That power has come down in an unbroken chain through the space of eighteen hundred years ; and it is from it, that I (and every other minister of the Gospel, in our branch of the episcopal Church,) have received authority to exercise the office which I hold—unworthy as I am of it—in the church of God.

Such in a few words is what I would understand by a Christian minister. And now let us consider what are the duties of that office, and the responsibility which is attached to it ; or what the Christian minister has to do.

He is appointed to preach the word of God, and to administer the holy sacraments of the Gospel. He is appointed to stand before the congregation and lead them in their prayers,—to read to them publicly the Holy Scriptures, to apply those Scriptures by preaching, and instruct them out of them in all things necessary to their salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ. But this is not all : he has “ to seek for Christ’s sheep which are dispersed abroad, and for His children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever.” And that he may do this the better, he is bound under a solemn promise to “ be ready (I quote from the Ordination Ser-

vice) with all faithful diligence, to banish, and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's word ; and to use both public, and private monitions and exhortations, as well to the sick as to the whole within his cure, as need shall require, and occasion be given." He is bound to " be diligent in prayers, and in reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as shall help to the knowledge of the same." Above all, he is bound " to frame and fashion himself and his family according to the doctrine of Christ ;" and to " maintain and set forward as much as in him lieth, quietness, peace, and love, among all Christian people." In one word, a minister of the Gospel is to be a watchman of the Lord : he is set " to watch for the souls for which Christ died," that no harm may happen to them : to watch and pray both for himself and his people, that they go not astray out of the narrow path which alone conducteth into life.

And is not this an anxious and difficult office ? Is it not full of labour,—full of responsibility ? Indeed, my brethren, it is. And none but those who have in a measure fulfilled it, can adequately conceive the burden of it.

It may seem indeed to a mere careless observer, that a clergyman's duties, especially in the country, are light and easy. It may seem that when Sunday

is past, his time is at his own disposal ; that there is little to disturb him, little to engage and divert his thoughts from his own concerns, until the Sabbath comes round again. But it is not really so. No, my brethren, the Sunday duties are but the crown of the six days' labours. Every day, every hour, a good minister of Christ is at work. He is watching how he may best keep the souls committed to his care ; watching for an occasion to do them good ; watching how he may speak a word in season ; watching how he may best warn the unruly,—how best comfort the feeble-minded,—how give an example to all : watching too, under a most solemn sense of the reckoning that awaits him : watching as one who must give an account,—not indeed to man—but to a far mightier, far more discriminating, far more heart-searching Being—even to God the Judge of all.

Truly, then, ours is not that light and easy office, that some would fancy it : rather it is one so grave, so arduous, that unless it had come to us in a lawful way, in the order of God's providence ; unless we had received it under His sanction, and were supported in it by His protection, we should, except in very rare instances, have never volunteered to take it upon ourselves. But, then,—and this is that which “ gives us consolation and good hope,” and helps to turn our labour into one of love,—we

know, and are convinced, that God's blessing accompanies God's ordinance ; that Christ's promise is, that He will be with His servants till the end of time. We feel assured that He who has permitted us to take part in the ministry of the Gospel, can, and will prosper us in the same : that he will give us strength, and boldness, and faith, and constancy, an unwavering mind, and every other qualification necessary to the fulfilling that work to which He has called us. We feel assured, as did one far stronger, far better, than any who have come after him in the ministry—as did St. Paul—that though of ourselves we are weak and insufficient, yet that “ our sufficiency is of God, who can make us able ministers of the New Testament.”

Still with all this, with all the support and assurance held out to us by our Lord, we cannot be confident : we still must feel our position to be one of great peril ; that we are liable through the infirmity of our flesh to betray the trust committed to us ; that it is possible “ after we have preached to others ” the doctrines of salvation, to be ourselves “ cast away.” There is risk, I say, nay there is a certainty, that if we suffer ourselves to be beguiled of our duty ; to speak smooth things in order to conciliate man, to cry peace to the sinner when there is no peace ; we shall draw down the heaviest punishment upon our souls. For what saith the

Holy Scripture, " Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel ; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life ; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand."

And now let us pass to the other point in our subject: to the duties and responsibilities of a people toward their minister. This is clearly, and shortly stated in the text, " Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves." Yes, my brethren, this is indeed your part and duty ; to yield due and ready obedience to the instruction of your minister, to hear the word, which in God's name he declares to you, and follow out the directions of that word in your practice. In no other way will it avail you to come, and sit, and listen to the Gospel, which is here Sunday after Sunday preached unto you. No, you must, as I have repeatedly insisted on, you must be doers, as well as hearers of the word. You must listen, not to have your ears pleased, but to have your hearts affected, and your conduct improved, and then you will not listen in vain.

And further ; St. Paul says in the text, " Sub-

mit yourselves ;" and mark well the admonition, for it is one necessary for you, and is part of your duty as Christian people, to submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake ; and to every ordinance of God and of His Church, for your own sake : because it is through those ordinances—the ordinance of baptism ; the ordinance of the Lord's Supper ; the ordinance of prayer and preaching,—that grace and health, and all things requisite to salvation are to be obtained.

So also is it necessary to submit to the reproof, the rebuke of your minister. I am aware that it is not easy so to do : we none of us like to be told of our faults ; still less to be rebuked for them. The idea of submitting—giving in—even though we know it is for our good, is not palatable to us. But then, on the other hand, consider this,—that neither is it an agreeable task for a minister to have to reprove ; he would gladly avoid it if he might : but he may not : he dare not : he may not, as he values his own soul, let vice, and folly go unreproved. He dare not, when he sees one of his flock wandering out of the way, omit any endeavour to reclaim him. He cannot, as an indifferent person, pass by and pretend not to see iniquity. No, he is a watchman of the Lord ; and the first qualification of a watchman is, that he be awake ; and so must every minister of the Gospel be. He must be

awake to whatever is going on around him ; quick and alive in detecting and exposing evil ; loud and earnest in giving the alarm to the party imperilled by it.

Do not, then, I beseech you, my brethren, be offended when rebuked by your minister for sin. Remember that in laying open your faults, in warning you of their consequences, his object is your true welfare ; to lead you to repent and forsake them ; and so, through God's mercy, to save your souls alive. Remember that we have an account to give of you, as well as of ourselves ; that we shall be chargeable before the throne of Christ, if we keep back any part of the counsel of God,—either the promises or the threatenings of the Gospel. And, remember also, that you too will have to answer in the same awful presence, for the way in which you receive our message : for the use, or abuse of the opportunities now afforded you. Remember that it is not upon the minister whose voice has been raised against sin, that God will visit in the day of judgment, but upon those reckless, and hardened, and impenitent persons, who in spite of warning, go on still in their wickedness. Remember the continuation of that passage out of Ezekiel which I quoted before, “ If thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked

way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul."

And now to bring my subject to a close. This being the last opportunity I shall have of speaking to you, there are many things I had desired to say: many things that you might have expected to hear from me. I might, for instance, have given you a kind of general exhortation to be true to your religious duties: I might have once again called upon you to hold fast the profession of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ without wavering: I might have warned you to beware how you neglected so great a salvation: I might have urged upon you the necessity of proving your faith by its fruits, by "provoking to love and good works:" I might have pointed out the sad, and grievous error into which they fall who suppose that sin may be committed, and yet the sinner go unpunished on account of the Atonement of the Cross: I might have shown you that the heavy wrath of the Almighty is proclaimed from heaven against all ungodliness, all unrighteousness of man; that the wilful sinner, the habitual breaker of God's holy commandments,—the drunkard, the adulterer, the thief, the malice-bearer, the covetous—have no part in the inheritance of the Lord's people; that purity of heart, chastity of body, temperance in all things, are what

the Gospel commands, and what God will require of all who through the sacrifice of His dear Son, look to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven.

I might have done all this, and mentioned many other things beside, which I could have wished to have left printed in your remembrance: but, on consideration, it seemed to me better to confine myself as much as possible to the single precept of the text,—to the earnest recommendation of what the Apostle advises,—the yielding due and proper obedience to your spiritual rulers: and for this reason; because if I mistake not, there is contained and implied in this single charge all that I could have said at greater length.

Take it, then, my brethren, as my parting counsel: the best advice that one who truly cares for your welfare has to offer, and may God graft it in your minds: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves in all things to their instruction.” Remember that your minister, whoever he may be, is set over you in the Lord: and the authority which he claims is not an authority over your persons; not over your actions, except so far as they are influenced by his teaching,—but only the right to help, and direct you in your pilgrimage through this world, and on your road toward a better.

Remember that he is God’s minister to you for

good ; that when he speaks as I do now from this place, he speaks not of himself, but as it is given him from above. Remember that he is bound by a most solemn vow, to rebuke, exhort, instruct, comfort, according as the necessity of the case shall require, and to do all that in him lieth to make you wise unto salvation : that—in one word—*he watches for your souls*: yes, and is accountable, strictly accountable to his heavenly Master, for the manner in which he conducts himself in that most anxious and arduous office,—accountable for his fidelity in preaching ; for his diligence in exhortation ; for the constancy of his prayers both for himself and for his flock ; for the purity, and consistency, honesty, and sobriety, of his own life and conversation. And consider that if your minister will have to answer thus narrowly for the performance of his duty towards you, so no less strict will the reckoning be that God will require at your hands over whom he presides. Consider that you will have to answer, at the dreadful day of judgment, for the manner in which you have availed yourselves of the wholesome instruction provided for you. You will have to answer for every sabbath misused ; for every absence from the service of this holy place ; for every disregard of the warnings here addressed to you ; for every hour's delay in neglecting the one thing needful. You will have

to answer for refusing to hear, and also for neglecting to heed, the message of your appointed minister. Consider, I beseech you, these things, my brethren; for your peace now, and your happiness hereafter, is involved in them: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account: that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you."

And now, my brethren, I must say to you, as I did this morning to many of your number—Farewell. It is a painful word, and I cannot speak it calmly. But painful as it is, it is a word that I should be loth to omit on this occasion: for it is a word expressive of good wishes, good hopes, mingled with keen regrets; and, therefore, well fitted to represent my feelings towards you. As such, then, receive it from me. Accept my heartfelt wishes for your happiness. Accept my sincerest regret at being separated from you. Accept my hope, my humble but earnest hope, that we shall one day meet again; if not in this world, yet in one far better. Again, then, and from the bottom of my heart, let me say to every one here present—Fare you well.

And this reminds me that my ministry among you is now closed. May God pardon the errors I have committed in it: and if in any the least de-

gree, I have been of service ; if amongst the many I now see before me, there be one or two individuals who have received benefit from the words that from time to time I have spoken,—one or two who have been quickened to a sense of the importance of religion, or stirred to a greater diligence in the practice of its duties,—to God be the glory and the praise. Only may He whose Spirit has begun the good work within their hearts, carry it forward to the end : may He establish, settle, and confirm them in the part which they have chosen : may He increase in them day by day the power of true religion : may He nourish them in all goodness, and finally conduct them to the rest in heaven.

And so, indeed, would I pray for all ; for rich and poor, for old and young. For those who perhaps till now have cared little about their souls' salvation ; for those who have done much to endanger their salvation : for each and for all, would I now offer this my humble but most hearty petition. I pray God, who is rich in mercy, plenteous in goodness and love, that He would pour upon you the dew of His heavenly blessing,—that He would draw your hearts, and all your affection to Himself,—that He would make you know and feel the great love of Jesus Christ your Saviour in dying for you, and the obligation under which you and all Christian persons lie, to hate and forsake sin, and

to lead a godly, a sober, and religious life,—that He would aid you in your endeavours so to live,—that He would pardon your many fallings back, and not be extreme to mark what you may have done amiss,—that He would strengthen you against temptation,—that He would support you in trouble,—that He would comfort you in sickness,—be with you in your passage through the dark valley of death, and save you in the awful day of judgment. And this I would beg, even in the manner after which He has commanded us to pray,—in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Little Hadham, June 13, 1847.

SERMON XVIII.

HARVEST SERMON.

ACTS xiv. 17.—“ Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good. And gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”

THE immediate cause which gave rise to these words being spoken is related in the second lesson for this morning. They form part of St. Paul's address to the people of Lystra, whither he had come in the course of his journeying to preach the Gospel, and where he had wrought a remarkable miracle, by healing a man of his lameness who had been a cripple from his mother's womb, and had never walked. Of the miracle itself little need be said, save that it was of that merciful description which characterizes our blessed Lord's like manifestations of power, and further, that the man on

whom it was wrought, was worthy of it: he *had faith* to be healed: and that faith was, through God's mercy, effectual to his recovery. What happened after the miracle is full of instruction; the idolatrous inhabitants of the place who witnessed what was done, ascribed the sudden cure of the lame man to the presence of their own divinities: they "lifted up their voices and said in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker." Jupiter being the chief heathen god, and Mercury the god of speech and eloquence, the constant attendant as well as messenger of Jupiter.

Nor was this all; not content with *calling them* gods, they were proceeding to honour them as such. "The priest of the Temple of Jupiter which stood before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice to them with the people." And here I may observe, that extravagant as this conduct may seem now, it was not so in the case of the Lystrians. They were, it is true, heathens, and worshipped idols, but they were *religious* heathens, and their religion taught them to believe not only in a number of gods, but also in their frequent interference with the affairs of men in the world. They believed them, indeed, to

be but little different from men except in being exempt from death, and capable of working miracles ; but in all other points much the same ; possessed of the like passions, and affections, only in a more intense degree. With such notions of the Deity, it is not surprising, that on witnessing the sudden effect of St. Paul's words upon the impotent man, they should have regarded him, and his companion,—persons whom they had never seen before,—foreigners in speech and appearance,—as more than mere mortals, as very present divinities ; and so regarding them, it naturally followed that they would be eager to pay them the reverence and homage which they sincerely believed to be their due. Their intention was good, for they knew no better : but the act, had it been carried out, would have been impious and wrong. This, however, the Apostles themselves prevented ; Paul and Barnabas were no impostors, no pretenders to a distinction that belonged not to their condition : had they been so, they would probably have encouraged the deluded people in their error, and so greatly added to their own influence and importance. But they did not so. They could not bear for an instant to accept that honour, which they knew was due to God only ; so they at once disclaimed and rejected it. Very striking is their language and demeanour, as told us in St. Luke's narrative : " They rent

their clothes"—the usual mark of grief and distress among the people of those countries—"they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

There is much that we may learn from this admirable address of Paul and Barnabas: but what I would especially desire you to observe in it, is the general tone of their reasoning. Their object in coming to Lystra,—that for which they had exposed themselves to peril in the midst of a bigoted and superstitious people,—was to bring that people to the knowledge and worship of the true God, and of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ; to lead them to cast away their idols of silver, and gold, and to worship the Lord, and Him only. It was no easy matter. How, then, did they seek to accomplish it? Not, my brethren, as they would have done among their own people at Jerusalem; not by appealing to the word of God as written in the Scrip-

tures of the Old Testament ; for those Scriptures were a closed book to the heathen, of no weight or authority among them. No—but by appealing to the outspread book of nature : to the heavens and the earth, and to the sea, and to all that cometh out of and is in them. To the rain that droppeth from above, fertilizing the parched soil : to the fruitful seasons, the result of that fertility : to the ample provision thereby made for man's support and comfort : to these—sights which they were all daily beholding—did the Apostles appeal, and justly too, as the surest witness to the being and rule of the one true God. They showed, by the exquisite arrangement of the material world, by the harmony which exists in all its parts, by the ever-recurring changes in the seasons, by the return of summer and winter, that this was not the work of a separate host of discordant deities, not of gods many, not of lords many, but the single uniform operation of an all-active, self-existing Providence. They showed—to use the beautiful language of early scripture—that none were counsellors with the Almighty in designing or executing His wondrous works. “ That none were by when He laid the foundation of the earth.” “ That none but He shut up the sea with doors, and gave it its bounds, which it might not pass. That none but He commanded the morning, and caused the day-spring to know its place. That

none but Jehovah in His untaught and eternal wisdom could have devised a method by which the light is parted, nor divided a watercourse for the overflowing waters, or made a way for the lightning of thunder, to cause it to rain on the earth, to satisfy the desolate and waste ground, to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth." And as the consequence of all this, the natural conclusion to such an appeal—none but this great and glorious Being was, they affirmed, to be worshipped. None but He could rightly claim the allegiance of man's heart and soul, by whom man himself and all things else had been originally created and made.

Such, I think, is the main lesson to be gathered from this speech of Paul and Barnabas, remonstrating with the zealous but misguided people of Lystra. They taught *them*, and they teach *us*, that Almighty God is Lord of heaven and earth : the Author and Giver of all the good things which we enjoy, and therefore the only proper and adequate object of our worship. It is, in fact, the first great truth of all religion, both natural and revealed ; a truth, for neglecting of which, even amongst the heathen, ignorance was not allowed to be pleaded in excuse : for, as St. Paul says, (the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans,) even in those days—days of darkness as compared with ours—there was

light enough to guide men into this knowledge: "The invisible things" of the Almighty—His eternal power and Godhead were "clearly seen," being understood by the things that "were made." Yes, my brethren, even the heathen of old, who possessed no direct revelation from heaven, might still discover (if they well considered) who it was to whom they were indebted for life, and health, and food, and all things; because the traces of His Power and Wisdom were visibly stamped on all that they saw around them; on the skies, on the fields, on the waters of the mighty ocean.

But—and this is what concerns us more directly—if the marks of God's Presence were so clear in those days, how much clearer are they now? If mankind were *then* capable of "feeling after and finding Him, how much more are we? We, who have been brought very nigh to Him in and through His beloved Son—we, indeed, *know*, what they only guessed at, that God "is not far from every one of us." We have every evidence which they had of His Being and protecting Providence: and we have infinitely more. Still, as of old, we may love to mark the *outward* signs by which He is revealed; we may still listen "to His voice in the garden," still hear it in the whispering trees and in the waving corn—but how much more audible and distinct is that voice which speaks to us in the page

of Scripture, that voice of the Incarnate Word which came out from God, and is God, and which tells us in the plainest accents of the Father; and of all that He has done for us, not in this world only, but also in reference to that which is to come. Verily, if we compare our state and that of the heathen in respect of religious knowledge, ours is as the perfect day, while theirs was but the early dawn,—and what follows? Why, surely, that we should “let our light shine before men, and glorify our Father which is in heaven. For unless we do this, it will have been given to us in vain, and we shall be in a worse position, and more inexcusable than the heathen.

But perhaps it may be urged, that this is so evident of itself as to need no further words. It may be said, that the minds of all reflecting persons, certainly of all Christians, are agreed in their notion of the Supreme Being, and of the duty which they owe towards Him. That we all look upon God, even as the Bible teaches us, as the one sole Almighty Creator, Governor, and Preserver of the universe: one under three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and that we are ready to ascribe to Him that honour and thanksgiving, and praise, and glory, which of right are His. And this may probably be true. Nay, I would not doubt but that *it is* true at least

in the case of all who now hear me. Surrounded as we are at this time of the year, on every side, with such bounteous witness to our great Father's love and care, we are surely ready to recognise His hand, and to acknowledge ourselves indebted to His goodness.

But though this be true,—although none of us, my brethren, could bear to be charged with overlooking God,—although none of us would dispute for an instant His righteous claim upon our utmost gratitude, it yet *may be* a question whether our acknowledgment and outward profession is sustained by our actual practice. For instance, is it true as a fact that we do keep up a constant sense of our obligation to, and dependence upon, God? Is it true as a fact, that we do make it a portion of every day's business, to render unto God hearty thanks for His continual goodness towards us? Is it true as a fact, that we never lie down to rest, never rise up to our usual employment, without an uttered prayer to Him who alone can protect us through the hours of darkness, and shield us from the perils and temptations of the day? Is it true as a fact, that we feel in our hearts that which we are so ready to confess with our lips, “That in God, and in *Him only*, we live, and move, and have our being.”

These are questions, the answer to which, whatever it may be, must greatly affect our spiritual

well-being ; and therefore they are questions suitable for us to put, each to himself, at all times : but at no time are they more so than at present : for at no time in the course of the whole year is the witness to God's over-ruling Providence more strikingly manifest, than in these "*the appointed weeks of the harvest.*" At no time are we called upon more imperatively to remember our Creator and Preserver than now, when He is accomplishing His own word ; literally " filling our hearts with food and gladness." For, my brethren, that such is the case ; that the harvest this year [1846], through God's mercy, has proved a good one, and the season for getting in has been most favourable, will, I am inclined to think, be allowed by you all. Already throughout the length and breadth of this well-cultivated country, large stores of grain are gathered in for the stay and sustenance of our vast population. And can we be partakers in this bounty, and not feel thankful for it ? Can we, because we have experienced it many times before, take it as a matter of course—as the natural return for the toil and pains we have bestowed upon our land ? I hope and trust that *we can not*. I hope and trust there is no one so satisfied with his own skill in cultivation, as not to see that all which he can do, would *be as nothing, but for* the wonder-working power of God : that man's part in bring-

ing forth food out of the earth—the haste which he makes “to rise up early and to late retire to his rest,” the care with which he dresses the ground and tends the rising crops, *would be all lost labour*, did not God first fertilize the soil, then give the germinating power to the seed sown, then protect it through the opposite danger of too much drought, or too much moisture, and finally bless it in the increase thereof.

If, my brethren, we allow this,—and who does not?—let us take care lest by our own confession we be guilty of ingratitude before God. Let us beware lest that reproach be in any degree applicable to some of us, which was spoken by the prophet Isaiah to God’s people of old—“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib : but Israel doth not know, my people will not consider.” And yet assuredly this charge will be true, if we let the present fruitful season pass away, without deriving from it the lesson it is so well adapted to convey—the lesson, deep, and lasting, of our entire dependence upon God; and without its awakening in us such a due sense of our obligation, as shall stir us up to warmer efforts, in making the best return we can to our all-bountiful Creator and Benefactor.

And what return can we give unto the Lord for all His benefits? What will He vouchsafe to receive at our hands? What but that pointed out to

us in the psalm, " We will receive the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. We will pay our vows unto the Lord now in the presence of His people, in the courts of the Lord's house." In other words, we should endeavour, by a more constant attention to our religious duties, by a more loving devotion, by a warmer worship, by a more eager partaking in all the sacred ordinances of our Christian faith, and, above all, by a more hearty surrender of ourselves to God in our daily lives, to testify our gratitude, " to show ourselves joyful before the Lord the King." Let us endeavour so to act; and then we may trust that the result of the present abundant harvest will be doubly blest: it will be blest to our immediate use, " to the satisfying our poor with bread," and will be blest in a far higher sense, to our soul's health and growth, by producing in us, by God's help and grace, (without which we can do nothing,) bringing forth day by day more perfectly the fruits of truly Christian—truly religious life."

Little Hadham, Aug. 16, 1846.

SERMON XIX.

THE USES OF ADVERSITY.

HEB. xii. 11. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous ; nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby."

SUCH is the language, in which St. Paul expresses his concurrence in one of the most characteristic doctrines of our Christian religion ; that doctrine which teaches us to look upon affliction as a sign of God's love, and calculated in the end to prove a blessing to those who are visited by it.

It is a doctrine that runs throughout the whole Bible, but which is brought out most fully in the New Testament, which finds a place in the sayings of our Divine Master, and in the writings of all His apostles and their immediate followers, and in

the sentiments of the Royal Psalmist : " Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." It is a truth worthy of all acceptance ; full of wisdom and instruction. I pray God that we may profit by our consideration of it to-day, and so learn to bear with patience, and resignation any manner of adversity, trouble, or sorrow, which it may please our heavenly Father to send upon us.

And first, let us observe the very simple and truthful manner in which St. Paul gives utterance to this great scriptural doctrine respecting the uses of adversity. He does not deny that afflictions are hard to bear, he does not try to reason us into a belief that pain is no evil : he fully admits that it is ; he fully admits, that to our human nature suffering of every kind is a sore burthen. "*No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous.*" It is to the *result*—to what follows after the affliction—to which he points our view, when he asserts " that it is good for us to be afflicted." "*Afterward* it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, unto them that are exercised thereby."

On this present occasion let us look for some instances, which, while they confirm the Apostle's words, may help to fix them in our minds, and render the application of them available to our peculiar circumstances.

Take the case (not an uncommon one) of a person who has grown up to full age untouched, and unsanctified by religion: a man careless about God, and careful only for the things of this present time; one whose whole thought is for what he shall eat—what he shall drink—what he shall put on—what he shall lay up for his children after him; one whose time is so entirely devoted to temporal pursuits, that he has no leisure to consult for the interests of eternity; a man who is seldom seen in God's house; seldom known to perform any act of devotion in his own home; in short, a man who, though not absolutely guilty of gross sins, is living without God in the world. In the midst of his earthly career such a man is visited with a severe sickness, his strength is brought down with fever, his body is racked with pain—he lies for a long time in a state between life and death; and though he at length recovers, he is no longer the same man as before: his health is broken; his bodily power is enfeebled; apparently his chastisement is very grievous; but it is not really so: God meant it for good, and His merciful purpose has not been defeated. The sickness of the body has been the means of arousing the sufferer to concern for his soul; in the hour of peril, he has been brought to feel how frail and uncertain is that hope, which is built only upon the enjoyments, and suc-

cesses of the present evil world ; he has become impressed with the importance of providing for the one thing needful, and *that* henceforth shall have his first care and attention ; the sabbath, before neglected, will now be his delight ; prayer and praise a part of every day's duty ; instead of living without God, he will live unto Him and for Him ; to do God's will, to retain His favour, will now be the chief purport, and aim of his remaining life ; in short, he will now labour as diligently for the " meat which endureth to everlasting life," as he did before for " the meat which perisheth."

Surely then, my brethren, it was good for this man to have been afflicted ; before he was troubled he went wrong, but now will he keep God's commandments.

The same good result may oftentimes be seen to result from mental sorrow : when God convinces us of our sins ; when He takes from us that false security, with which many deceive themselves ; crying " peace, when there is no peace,"—when He takes away this, and shows us our real condition ; the poverty and nakedness of our souls ; the little preparation we have made against the coming of our Lord, and the danger we are in of being condemned when that day arrives ; when He brings up and passes in array before our minds the sad list of our actual sins—sins committed wantonly,

and in spite of warning ; when, on the other hand, He recalls to our thoughts the many opportunities we have lost ; the many religious privileges we have abused ; the Sundays we have spent in idleness and folly ; the summons to the Holy Sacrament which we have so often disregarded ; the sound of the funeral bell which has fallen powerless upon our ears, instead of being a note of preparation for our own departure ;—when all these recollections come upon us, what language can describe the bitterness and desolation of heart that they produce ? We are possessed, utterly occupied, and engrossed with the remembrance of our former sins ; like David in the Psalms, we “ have no rest in our bones ;” we are not able to look up ; fearfulness and trembling overtake us, and a horrible dread overwhelmeth us : dread of God’s anger—dread of that punishment which we know we have deserved, and which the Holy Scripture tells us “ is prepared for those who live ungodly.” What chastisement is more grievous than this ? If the pains of sickness are hard to bear, how far more intolerable are those bitter pangs which conscience inflicts upon the mind, when first awakened to a sense of its guilt ? But here again God is merciful ; He corrects us with judgment, but not in His anger : in due time even this heaviness can, and will be turned into joy : let but the conscience—

smitten sinner confess his sins, let him humble himself, and cry unto God mightily for pardon, and with full purpose of amendment, and the load under which he labours will be lightened; God will grant him grace to repent, and on his repentance will forgive him, for Christ's sake, and because of that blood that was shed for sinners on the cross. Yes, and this repentance will not end with the recovery of God's favour; it will assuredly work in the penitent its proper fruits; it will lead him not only to renounce, but to hate, and abhor sin, and follow step by step in that narrow path of watchfulness, of self-denial, of purity and devotion, that is marked out in the Gospel; that path, in which the Lord himself went before, and in which all must seek to walk, who hope through His infinite merits to escape the temptations that are in the world, and to be made partakers of the kingdom of heaven.

And thus the apostle's words in the text are again fulfilled; the chastisement which in the beginning seemed so grievous, is once more found to have been mercifully inflicted: "it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby."

There are other cases that might well serve to illustrate the like truth, but one only will I mention further to-day: and that is the removal by death of those who are dear to us. Of all the

• sorrows of which our fallen nature is capable, this is the most poignant and severe; it is as common, too, as it is severe: there is scarcely any one amongst us beyond the age of infancy who has not tasted of this cup; and many have been made to drink it even to the dregs; it is a sorrow that can bow down the stoutest heart, and wring tears from the most hardened natures—it is *indeed not joyful for the present, but very grievous*; and yet great, grievous, and severe as this sorrow surely is, it is perhaps of all the remedies which God uses for the discipline of our souls, the most effectual: I mean to say, my brethren, that more good results arise from this grief than would from any other quarter.

There are examples without number in which the death of some dear child, some beloved parent, or wife, or husband, has been to the surviving members of the family the beginning of infinite blessing, and for this reason,—because it has drawn off their minds from earthly things, and fixed them upon higher objects,—because death, by taking from them that on which they trusted too fondly for their happiness, has caused them to look out for support of a more lasting kind, and in a direction where it is sure to be found, even in Him “who is the Lord of life and death, and of all things to them belonging,—because it hath taught them that

lesson which in our present state seems so hard to learn—the lesson that God will have no rival in man's heart—that our best and purest affections are due to Him—that if we cannot, when He demands it of us, leave father, or mother, or wife, or sister, we are not worthy to be called his sons; it is a lesson hard to learn, but when learnt, very profitable to our good. When our God is loved and feared as He ought to be, then will His will and pleasure be the first things thought of; then will there be an end to that strife which now divides our hearts—the strife between His service and the service of the world; we shall then no longer be amongst the number of the wavering, the undecided, the would-be (but faint-hearted) Christians; convinced of God's claim to our best, though unworthy service, we shall yield ourselves His servants to obey, and His servants (as the apostle tells us) are “servants of righteousness, bearing fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.” Our affliction, which seemed so heavy in the beginning, is through God's mercy made to minister to our welfare; it worketh for us, when rightly received, “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

From what has been said, I think it will be obvious to you all, that the sorrows, sicknesses, anxieties, and afflictions, of whatever sort they be,

which come upon us in this life, are sent from God, and intended for a wise and benevolent purpose; that they are the instruments of His mercy—the means that He uses in order to rescue us from the bondage of our sins;—that it is through these sharp but necessary remedies, that our lusts are quenched, our selfish aims defeated, our hearts purified, our worldly-mindedness corrected, and our affections called off from lighter things, and made to centre upon God.

And here I might conclude, with the hope that you and I, my brethren, might be enabled to profit by the teaching of the apostle upon this important subject, and might learn from him, that patient bearing, under the pressure of God's chastisements, which best befits a Christian, and which is suited to ripen in us the fruit that God requires—the fruits of righteousness, of gentleness, and peace. But the circumstances of the past week seem to render necessary a closer application of the text; I cannot, my brethren, think of what occurred last Sunday, and witness the mournful appearance that many of our number present, without endeavouring to administer such consolation as Holy Scripture warrants for your affliction. I feel that it is difficult, most difficult, to do this. Heavy indeed is the chastisement under which you are suffering, grievous must that mourning be which is called for

by the loss of an only son, and that son so worthy of your love ! But still there must be a limit even to this. You must not sorrow as them who have no hope—you must not in the full tide of your natural grief lose sight of this scriptural truth ; *that all afflictions work together for good to those who love God* ; you must not doubt that even this terrible bereavement was intended for your profit—that out of a sorrow, deep even as yours, God can make to grow the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. Therefore “ lift up the hands that hang down and the feeble knees ; ” receive at the Lord’s hand the cup which He giveth you to drink ; *now* is the trial of your faith, *now* is the day of your visitation ; now therefore let your patience appear ; show by your resignation—your calm submission to what is appointed, that your hope and trust are in the Lord : humble yourselves under His mighty hand, and in due time He will raise you up ; cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you—forget not “ the exhortation which speaketh to you as unto children ; my son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord ; nor faint when thou art rebuked of him, for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth : ” faint not, but earnestly believe that the stroke under which you labour has been given in mercy, and that if you bear it pa-

tiently, it shall turn to your profit, and help you forward in the right way that leadeth unto everlasting life. And may He who is the God of comfort and consolation, after that ye have suffered awhile, stablish, strengthen, settle you ; to Him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.

* Preached at Hartley Wespall, October, 1847, on the occasion of the sudden death, under peculiarly distressing circumstances, of a young man of exemplary conduct, the only son of the principal farmer.

SERMON XX.

THANKSGIVING DAY.

PSALM xxx. 11, 12.—“Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise unto thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.”

IN these eloquent words David closes one of those beautiful hymns of thanksgiving to God, which are so numerous in the book of Psalms. The present one is very remarkable, and being appointed for the service of this day's solemnity, has a peculiar claim upon our attention.

It appears, from perusing it, that the Almighty had recently delivered His servant out of some great and overwhelming danger, a danger which threatened him and his people with certain destruction, and which, as he tells us, he had incurred through overmuch pride, and false confidence in

his own resources ; “ In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.” Out of this sinful state he had been aroused by a heavy judgment from God : “ Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled.”

This particular trouble is supposed to be that pestilence which the Lord sent upon Israel after the numbering the people ; a pestilence which in three days carried off seventy thousand souls. In the midst of this trouble and affliction, David remembered his Maker, and turned unto Him in penitence and prayer ; “ Then cried I unto thee, O Lord, and gat me to my Lord right humbly.” And with the best success ; God hearkened unto him, and the pestilence was stayed. It is this deliverance that he describes in the end of the psalm ; “ Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing ; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness : to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.”

Such was the view which David took of God's mercy in saving him from destruction. He looked upon it as designed for this express purpose ; for bringing forth the praises of God out of his heart. “ Thou hast girded me with gladness, to the end that my glory (or soul) should praise thee, and not be silent.” And such he promises shall be its effect ; he vows eternal gratitude to his great Bene-

factor; "O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever."

Now the application of this psalm to our own case must be obvious to you all. We, like David, have been troubled: we have experienced the hiding of God's face, the withdrawal of His protecting favour from our land. The cause, too, of our judgment seems to have been the same,—over confidence in our own strength, and that which over confidence produces, forgetfulness of God. In our affliction we sought the Lord; we sought Him as David did, with weeping, and with mourning, and with prayer. Nor has our supplication been made in vain. The Lord has hearkened unto us, and has restored to us what for our sins had been withdrawn,—the light of His countenance. Again, as before, He has looked upon our land for good, and poured down upon us the riches of His goodness. The famine and the pestilence,—those sore judgments with which we were threatened, and which to a certain point have spread desolation over these countries, are now, we trust, removed from us. "For mourning," God has given us, as to His king of old, "the oil of joy;" for the "spirit of heaviness," "the garment of praise." He has taken away our sackcloth, and "girded us with gladness;" and no doubt for the same purpose as aforetime, namely, "to the end that our soul should

sing praise to Him, and not be silent,"—to the end that our song should be of His loving-kindness: that we, like David of old, should "speak the praise of the Lord, and give thanks unto His holy name for ever and ever."

Yes, my brethren, and in a degree this end has been attained: ever since our corn increased, ever since the produce of our late abundant harvest has been gathered into the barn, there has been in the hearts of many, nay, I would believe of all who have been witnesses of such bounty—a yearning towards God, a longing desire to enter into the courts of His house, with the voice of praise and thanksgiving. We have said one to another, in anticipation of this holy time, "When shall I come to appear before the presence of God?" And now, when by the appointment of our rulers the day has arrived, that desire, that yearning of the heart, is being fulfilled. Everywhere throughout the breadth and length of this thickly-peopled land; multitudes are assembled together, even as we now are, in the sanctuary of God to give utterance—public, and simultaneous utterance—to the sentiments of piety and gratitude towards Him. Everywhere have the same solemn prayers been offered, the same praises poured forth before the Lord.

There is nothing wanting to the outward sight to complete the picture which England this day

presents ; the picture of a christian nation united together for an object of the very highest nature ; united together to record its obligations to the Almighty ; to give their thanks with one mouth, and one mind, for all the benefits which we have received at His hands, and more particularly for this last mark of His favour ; in rescuing our souls from death ; in not giving us over to the pestilence ; in “ filling our borders with the flower of wheat.” There is nothing wanting to the outward sight,—but who shall say that there is nothing wanting in the sight of God ? Who shall say that amongst the worshippers now congregated in His courts, there are not some who will offer an unacceptable service ; some who will seek the Lord this day without reverence or holy fear, only from carnal and worldly motives ; some who resemble those disciples whom our Lord rebuked, because they followed Him, not for the miracles which He did, but because they did eat of the loaves and were filled ?” That this may not be the case with any of us ; and with a view to advance the object for which this solemn thanksgiving has been ordered, let me shortly offer some few considerations which the services in which we have been engaged mainly suggest : such considerations as may, by God’s blessing, serve to fix in our minds a lasting remembrance of the mercies we have just received,

impress us with a deep sense of our obligation to Him from whom they come,—and help to promote His glory, by uniting us together more firmly than before, in the bands of christian holiness, and unity, and godly love.

And, first, what is the most evident fact brought before our eyes to-day? Is it not the power, and goodness of God? Have not these been wonderfully displayed in our deliverance? To what else can we ascribe it that the apprehension of an increasing famine, a fear (a few months back so prevalent) of a dearth throughout the whole world, has now been allayed? To what else can we assign the cause of the fertility now so general; that wisely ordered succession of rain, and sunshine, which has worked so largely for our good, which has produced, not only in England, but throughout the world, such vast stores of food for our support. To what else shall we attribute the check upon that blight, last year so ruinous, which, had it continued, threatened to destroy altogether one great source of provision; and might, for what we know, have extended to other kinds of fruit as well? Surely to nothing else but to the power, and goodness of God. It was not, my brethren, our own arm, our own ingenuity, which helped us in our calamity, but God's arm and His right hand which hath done this. Do what we could, "rise up early,

late take rest," toil incessantly in cultivating the land, and "eat the bread of carefulness," all had been in vain but for Him. Had He continued His displeasure, had He not "visited the earth, and blessed it," had He not multiplied our seed sown, as He only can multiply it, had He not watched over its growth, and sheltered it from a thousand harms, and finally enabled us to gather it into the garner, there must have been, ere now, an amount of suffering which it is fearful to contemplate. The straitness of provision under which we laboured last winter, would, had the harvest failed this year, have become actual famine, and our streets and villages would have presented sights of sorrow, and anguish such as we know to have occurred in a part of the empire less favoured than that in which we dwell. God's mercy alone has prevented this. "O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men,—for He satisfieth the empty soul, and filleth the hungry soul with gladness."

But besides the *power* and *goodness* of God, which have been so abundantly witnessed to by the events of the last few months, there is another great attribute of the divine character which claims our reverential attention: and that is, the *faithfulness* of God. This indeed has been manifest in a most

remarkable manner. It is written of the Almighty, that though He will not spare the guilty, and cannot bear to look upon iniquity, yet "that He is a God to whom mercies and forgiveness belong,"—that He does not desire the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his sin, and be saved,—that if we confess our sins, and humble ourselves before Him, with full purpose of amendment, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Now all this language respecting God has literally been fulfilled towards us. We are witnesses this day that the word of the Lord is true,—that He is that which He proclaims Himself to be, "The faithful God that keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him unto a thousand generations." We were not ignorant of this great truth before, but the circumstances of the present year must have doubly assured us of it. But seven months, and this whole nation were suppliants at the throne of God for mercy. Like the Ninevites of old, we proclaimed a fast, we "cried unto the Lord mightily," from the greatest even unto the least. Our reasoning then was, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger that we perish not?" And what is the result? God has accepted our humiliation: He has heard our prayer: He has shown Himself

towards us what He was to them of old,—a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness. That which He spake in a vision of the night to His servant Solomon, after the dedication of the temple, has actually been brought to pass in our own country, and before our own eyes,—“I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice. If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; if my people which are called by my name shall *humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*” Surely, my brethren, when we consider how exactly this promise has been realized towards us, we may well “stand in awe” of Him in whose book it is written; we may well say with David, “Thy word, O Lord, is true from everlasting; all the judgments of thy righteousness endure for evermore.”

Once more,—the service of to-day, besides that it speaks of God’s goodness, and favour, and truth, speaks also of our own sinfulness and unworthiness. It leads us to acknowledge that we have not manifested a due regard for the numberless blessings, temporal and spiritual, which we have met with at God’s hands: it reproaches us with our neglect of

His ordinances, with our misuse of His bounties. And these are subjects of which we need continually to be reminded: let us not forget them now. Let us not, while we thank God for our deliverance out of a very grievous trouble, omit to notice the cause to which that trouble must be ascribed. The cause was sin. It was the national ungodliness, the gross wickedness that existed in our land, and which it is to be feared, still exists to a very large extent,—the open contempt of God's commandments,—the profanation of His holy sabbaths,—the blasphemous use of His sacred name,—the scant attendance at His house of prayer,—the neglect of family worship,—the prayerless lives of many professed Christians,—the covetousness and self-indulgence of the rich,—the discontent of the poor,—the want of union and Christian sympathy amongst all classes of the people,—the variance and emulation, strifes and enmities, which unhappily divided the members of the one body of our Lord. These, we believe, were the evil ingredients which filled until it overflowed the cup of our country's iniquity. These were the offences which cried to God for punishment, which moved Him to visit us with the rod of His anger,—the sore scourge of famine and pestilence.

That visitation has, we hope and trust, ceased for the present. God has not dealt with us after our

sins, nor rewarded us in proportion to our iniquities. The punishment has been less, far less than we had deserved to bear ; but still sufficient for our warning. In the straitness of the famine there perished, as we are informed, in Ireland, upwards of a million of our fellow-subjects ; and they were not sinners more than ourselves. Does not their death repeat the lesson which our Lord gives us in the Gospel, " Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Indeed, my brethren, it does, and we shall not be wise, if we neglect so to interpret it. The mercy, the forbearance, which the Almighty has shown towards us, will assuredly add to our condemnation, unless it leads us to amendment. And how shall that amendment be carried on better than in those very points wherein we have been found wanting ?

If then, before, God's holy laws have been broken, let us for the future strive to do them more religiously. If His ordinances have been neglected, let us henceforth more diligently keep them. If His bounties have been misused, let us see that we now use them more worthily. Instead of that thankless receiving of the fruits of our land, as though we were indebted to no one but ourselves for their growth, let us always give glory to Him, whose Providence alone has preserved them to our use, and whose mercy has spared us to enjoy them. Let us, I say,

not keep still silence in the midst of the manifold blessings by which we are surrounded, but always, at all times and in all places, let us give hearty and humble thanks to God for all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hearty and humble thanks to Him for His wondrous love, of which we are tasting day by day : in which we live, and move, and have our being. But, above all, thanks and praise for that strongest proof of it,—the redemption of our souls from death, through the sufferings of His beloved Son.

Once more, ere I conclude, let me ask you, as I am in duty bound, to show forth your love and gratitude to God by a work of Christian charity. Almsgiving seems inseparable from true thanksgiving : if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. If we have received a blessing from Him, the least that we can do is to impart as hare of it to the indigent, and afflicted ;—and who are more indigent, who more afflicted, than those of our fellow-subjects in Ireland, and some of the destitute parts of Scotland, who are put forth as claimants for relief on this occasion ? The Letter of the Queen tells us, “ that notwithstanding all that has been done,” (and much, I allow, has been done,—much by every class of persons throughout the country, yet notwithstanding this,) “ a large portion of the population in these countries is still

suffering severe distress, distress which can only be relieved by the charitable aid of their brethren throughout the empire." That aid will not, I am persuaded, be denied them. Though we may not have much to spare from our own immediate necessities ; though our home charities have the first and foremost claim upon our resources ; yet something we may all afford ; we may all, rich and poor, help to increase the national gratitude by contributing to the relief of those less prosperous than ourselves. For remember what the Apostle tells us of a like occasion, " The administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God." Therefore, my brethren, " shew ye to them, and before the churches," the proof of your love. " Freely ye have received, freely give." Every man according as he purposeth in his heart ; " not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver."

Hartley Wespall, Oct. 17, 1847.

SERMON XXI.

ALL SAINTS' DAY.

REV. xiv. 13.—“ And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth : yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours ; and their works do follow them.”

THE very glorious and gracious truth which these words contain, is one that has in all ages since the time they were written, been a source of comfort and encouragement to the Christian. The assurance here given us by St. John of an after-life of rest and recompense,—an assurance conveyed, as you will observe, by a direct communication from the Almighty—by a voice from Heaven—is such as may well serve to smooth all the difficulties, trials, troubles, and temptations, however manifold and bitter they may be, with which, while in this world, we have to contend.

It is on this account, no doubt, because of the *blessedness* which is here promised, that our church has selected this particular verse to be read at the burial of the dead,—read, too, at that part of the solemn service when its comfortable words are most required, even at that moment when the last anxious looks of the accompanying mourners are rivetted upon the narrow opening which already holds the object of their regret and grief. Then, when the body has been committed to the ground, when to all human seeming it is cut off for ever from our gaze,—when the noise of the scattered mould echoed from the coffin lid, shoots with a pang across the heart, proclaiming the nothingness of our being,—then, when hope itself almost dies within us, are these words of comfort to be pronounced by the minister, “I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth : yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.”

Surely, if at such a moment anything could stem the flood of natural sorrow, and turn it into peace and resignation, it would be this. And that such, in many cases, is its effect, your own experience will, I think, confirm. For have you not, my brethren, have you not all, when placed in circumstances of this kind, felt the power of these words ?

Can you not recall the hour when, standing by the grave of some departed relative or friend, you have received comfort in the midst of your affliction from this declaration—"Blessed are the dead"? Have you not received comfort yourselves, and have you not administered to others, this healing medicine for their woe?

But the comfort of these words does not cease with the circumstances under which we are first affected by them. In all the remainder of our lives they will stay with us, and continue to cheer us; in the day of adversity; in the hour of temptation; when depressed by want; when harassed with sickness; we shall be led by them to reflect upon the happier condition of our departed friend. We shall joy to think that his soul is beyond the reach of all we endure; beyond the reach of all peril, and all sorrow; safe in the hand of God, at rest, and in peace. And so far from repining at his being taken from us, so far from wishing to call him back again, our earnest prayer, our daily aim, will be so to live now, that we may not be separated from him hereafter; that we, too, when we die, may enter into the rest of God.

These reflections upon the "blessedness of the dead who die in the Lord," are surely at no time unsuitable for us as Christians to entertain. But they appear more directly to force themselves upon

our minds after reading the service, and considering the spirit of that festival which we this day celebrate—the festival of All Saints,—so called because it is the day on which our church remembers with praise, and thanksgiving, not one or two of her holiest, and now happy members—not Saint Paul, not Saint Peter, not Saint Stephen—not any one apostle or martyr, for whom, as you know, there are particular festivals—but the day on which she remembers all her holy ones—all the saints—all of every time, age, language, nation, and degree, who have ever died as they lived—in the faith and fear of God, and of His Christ. Yes, and all the people of God who are yet in the world ; for these, as living members of their Lord's one body, are knit together in a real but mysterious union with one another, and with those who are departed : a union of hope, and charity, and faith.

All these are comprehended in the service of this day ; a service which need not give rise to feelings of gloom and grief, but rather to those of joy and gladness : for it carries our thoughts upwards, even to those realms of bliss where the souls of the faithful are in joy, and felicity : it carries our thoughts upwards, and leads us to give, as indeed we are most bound to do, all thanks, and praise to our Almighty Father for rescuing so many of His creatures out of the bondage of sin and death.

Such being the intention for which this day has been appointed to be kept holy, the importance of so observing it, and the benefit that may be derived from so doing, is manifestly great. If it be a good thing to have our hearts and minds lifted up, even for a little moment, above the load of our earthly occupations,—if it be a good thing to have the pattern of “just men made perfect” exhibited to our view for our admiration, and emulation,—if it be a good thing to be put in mind of our common “fellowship in the Gospel,” of the close union which subsists between the members dead or living of the one body or church of the Lord Jesus Christ;—if, lastly, it be a good thing to be stirred up to greater diligence in all christian duties,—if this be good for our souls’ health, (and who will say that it is not?) then, surely it is a good, and a blessed thing to do on this day as appointed for us,—to keep in memory the company of the saints, of those who have been redeemed to God out of all kindreds, nations, and languages of the whole world; to keep them in memory, and to consider their conversation, their actual life and demeanor amongst men, with a view to follow their faith, if so be that we finally, through God’s aid, and guidance, may as well as they come to those unspeakable joys, which He has prepared for them that love Him, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us, then, my brethren, shortly recur to that account of God's holy people which is given us in the service of to-day ; for from it we shall be able to gather some faint notion of what they were while in the world, and of what they are now that they have been taken out of it.

And first, let us look at their character and conduct while in the world. They are described in the second lesson for this morning as working manfully the works which God gave them to do, and bearing patiently the troubles which He gave them to suffer. Of their works, and in some cases of their rewards, we are told in these words : " They subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens, women received their dead raised to life again." Of their sufferings and of their endurance we read as follows : " Others were tortured not accepting deliverance ; that they might obtain a better resurrection : and others had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds, and imprisonment : they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain by the sword ; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented ; (of whom the

world was not worthy :) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."

And here I may observe that this account of the doings, and sufferings of God's saints is completely borne out by what is recorded of them in the Bible. A very little acquaintance with the history of the Old Testament will enable us to find an individual example of each separate case above described, whether of endurance, or of affliction. Abraham will occur to your minds as an eminent pattern of a man "working righteousness" and "obtaining promises;" promises for himself and his posterity for evermore, and promises of life and safety for those on whose behalf he entreated with the Almighty. David and Joshua signalized themselves by subduing the kingdoms of God's enemies. Samson, when "the Spirit of God came mightily upon him," rent a lion as he would have rent a kid, that roared upon him out of the vineyards of Timnath. And Daniel, "forasmuch as innocency was found in him," was not hurt by the savage beasts, though shut up with them in their den. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, walked unscorched amidst the burning fiery furnace: Moses escaped the sword of Pharaoh; David that of Goliath; Job and Hezekiah were wonderfully recovered and "made strong" out of desperate sickness: Gideon was valiant in

fight, and turned to flight the enemies of Israel; the poor widow of Zarephah, and the rich woman of Shunem, are familiar examples of the "women who received their dead raised to life again."

And then of those who were called upon to suffer; —Eleazar and the seven Maccabean brethren, chose to die by a most cruel, and torturing kind of death, rather than accept deliverance, and save their lives by the least departure from the holy laws of their religion.

Of mockings, and scourgings, of bonds, and imprisonments, that awaited those who were true to their God, instances too many to particularize, may be brought both from the Old and New Testament. But none can be mentioned to compare with those which were heaped upon the Saviour of the world—upon Him, who "in bringing many sons to glory, was Himself made perfect through suffering,"—who, as the prophet foretold, "was despised, and rejected of men,—was wounded for our transgressions,—was bruised for our iniquities,—by whose stripes we are healed," who was "taken from prison," and led bound to be crucified. Zechariah was stoned because he reproved Joash for idolatry, and Stephen under the Gospel shared the same fate, because he preached Jesus, and denounced those who had been His murderers. Isaiah the great prophet was sawn asunder by order of Manasseh.

I might go on with this sad list until the end, and give, as I have already done with the former part of it, close examples of persons suffering every torment, and patiently enduring every distress in submission to the will of God, and in consequence of their stedfastness to their religion. But enough has been said to show that the language of St. Paul in describing their history is not overcharged, not coloured a jot beyond what actual experience would warrant. Enough too, I think, has been said to show that affliction, persecution, manful resistance against every form of evil, scorn, and contempt amongst men, have marked in a most striking manner the pathway of the just during their progress through this life of trial.

I now come to consider the principle, the influencing principle, by which these holy men were enabled to do, and to endure what is recorded of them. It was a principle, my brethren, which we have often on our lips,—would that we had it rooted in our hearts. It was in one word, Faith; a living trust in, and reliance upon, God,—a firm, deep-seated conviction that nothing could come upon them without His permission,—that nothing could hurt them beyond His power to heal them; that even death itself could not separate them from His love. It was a faith that realized the things unseen; that looked beyond the course of worldly

events, and the career of worldly men (which from their apparent prosperity is so apt to deceive,) into another state of being, where they felt assured all inequality would cease, all wrong be rectified, all virtue be rewarded, all wicked doers punished. Here, then, in the principle of a living active faith, we may find the key to the whole character, the groundwork of the whole conduct of God's people : hence their ardent desire to please God ; hence their devotion to His law ; hence their indifference to this world's goods ; hence their confession that they were " strangers and pilgrims on the earth ;" hence their patience, yea, their joyfulness, in times of distress, and calamity. That which Paul (who in later days, and with clearer knowledge, walked in the steps of the same faith,) that which he spake of himself and his fellow-labourers in the Gospel, had its first fulfilment in their days who went before him. " Though troubled, they were not destroyed ; though perplexed, they were not in despair ; though persecuted, they felt they were not forsaken ; though cast down, they were not destroyed." And was such confidence misplaced ? was it vain that they believed upon God, and nerved themselves for so great a fight of affliction in withstanding His enemies ? Was it vain that they chose rather to suffer if so be it was His will, than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, and follow the multitude

to do evil? No, my brethren, it was not. God is a just and righteous God, and He never forsaketh, never deceiveth those who put their trust in Him, and yield themselves His servants to obey. They were faithful unto death, and now they have a crown of life. Hear the glorious description of their happiness, as it was granted to St. John by anticipation to behold: these are his words, towards the close of the Epistle of this morning: "I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence come they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me" (and mark the answer), "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the

Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple ; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters ; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Such is the description of their condition in heaven who were God's people in the world : and can anything be more glorious, more exceedingly blessed ; to stand clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands,—that is, to stand arrayed in innocence and triumph before the throne of the everlasting God ; to serve Him night and day in His temple ; to have Him dwelling there visibly among them ; to be incapable of any want, of any pain ; to hunger no more, to thirst no more ; but to follow the Lamb, by the living waters of immortality ; to taste of the pleasures which are at His right hand, (pleasures pure and intense beyond what present thought of man can conceive,) these are the words made use of by the Holy Spirit to give us some idea of what their happiness will be, who struggling with temptation to the end, shall through the mercy of the Saviour, attain that world, and be counted worthy of that resurrection. What can we con-

ceive, what can we desire of happiness more than this? And yet these words, bright and glowing as they are, can give but a most imperfect idea of the actual rest and glory which they foreshadow. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

And now before I conclude, let me address a few words to you of application of what we have been considering. We have seen, as it is drawn out in the Scriptures of to-day, the portion of God's people; we have seen how greatly they endured, and how gloriously they are rewarded. The inference is, as was long ago drawn by the Apostle, "that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." "That we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." It need not be that we should be exposed to great bodily suffering, or be called upon to work great acts of might, as was the case aforesaid: but tribulation of one sort or another we shall all have to undergo: tribulation in struggling with sin; tribulation in withstanding temptation; in bending our wills to God's will, and ruling ourselves after His word. If we be poor, we shall have in addition to this,—the common trial of us all—to struggle against those feelings which the circumstance of our lot is but too likely to call forth; against discontent; against envy,

against a repining, and unsubmitive temper. If we be rich, we shall have to struggle against the ill effects of prosperity, against indifference to the afflictions of others, against hard-heartedness, against covetousness, against that false sentiment of security which whispers to our soul, "thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." In a word, whatever be our condition, whatever our degree in life, we have all, as many as would have any hope of finding happiness in heaven, a great contest to carry on at present, a great warfare to maintain; a warfare, not with one another, but with ourselves, with our besetting sins, with the temptations by which we are peculiarly assailed; it is a warfare in which we must expect affliction, in which we cannot be successful without enduring hardness. But let us not be discouraged, let us not shrink from those acts of self-denial, and self-mastery, without which, such is our natural corruption, we cannot be fitted to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. We have *them* for our guides, and for our examples; they in their day were men of like passions with ourselves; sinful men by nature, and without power to will, or to do anything that was good. How was it that they in the end were so victorious,—more than conquerors? It was because they had faith,—they

trusted in God, and prayed unto God, and He heard their prayer, and helped them: He gave them strength to have victory, and to triumph against the world, and the flesh, and the devil. And will not He give us also strength if we seek it from Him? Has He not pledged Himself to do so? Yes, truly. He who gave His only-begotten Son to die for our sin, will not withhold from us that gift of grace, and sanctification, without which His death had been in vain. "Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find." Pray God to give you grace to follow His blessed saints in all virtuous, and godly living, and doubt not that if sincere, He will enable you to do so. And then how blessed will you be; for if you tread in their steps here, nothing shall exclude you from their society hereafter. *You too*, in due time, when you have finished your course, when you have accomplished your warfare, when you have kept the faith, shall be among the number of those who are counted happy in their death. *You too* shall "come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly, and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Medi-

ator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

Little Hadham, 1846.

SERMON XXII.

THE WIDOW OF NAIN.

St. Luke vii. 14, 15.—“ And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak.”

OF all the miracles recorded of our blessed Lord in the Gospel, there are three which are calculated to make the deepest impression upon the mind of a devout believer. I allude to those in which He manifested forth His power in the most striking manner by raising to life one that was dead. Of these, the first was that which He wrought at Capernaum when he raised to life the only daughter of the ruler of the synagogue, Jairus; and this is related by all the evangelists except St. John. The second—that to which the text refers—the recovery of the widow's son at Nain, is found only in St.

Luke; whilst the third and most remarkable, (on account of the absorbing interest of the incidents,) namely, the calling up of Lazarus after he had been dead four days, is peculiar to the Gospel of St. John.

It is to the second of these miracles that, seeing it has already come before us in the Gospel for the day, I purpose to call your attention this morning. The circumstances are thus briefly told us by the Evangelist: "It came to pass the day after, that He went into a city called Nain." By referring to the narrative in St. Luke we find that our Lord, the day before He entered Nain, had performed a miracle in healing the servant of a centurion at Capernaum; that centurion of whose faith, and humility so pleasing a testimony is given in the Gospel.

It was then on the day after this work of mercy, that the Lord, whose whole life on earth was spent in doing good, drew nigh to the city of Nain, which like Capernaum was a city of Galilee, and therefore in the country where most of the mighty acts of Jesus were performed. In His progress to the place He was accompanied by many of His disciples, and a large crowd of people, who had probably witnessed, or heard of the cure of the centurion's son, and who followed our Lord in expectation of beholding some fresh display of power and goodness.

As they approached the gate of the city, they

were met by a sight of grievous sorrow; "behold there was a dead man carried out to be buried, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow." What a picture of desolation is presented to us in this short statement! a mother mourning for the loss of her only son—and she a widow! tasting of that sorrow which because of its exceeding bitterness, the prophet Jeremiah introduces in that appeal, wherein after proclaiming the wrath of God, he calls upon the Jews to mourn for the judgment about to fall upon them for their sins, "O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes, make thee mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation." It is a sharp trial, as many of you must know, to lose a child in any circumstances; even when there be many in a family, the death of one brings a gloom over all, and many months, many years must pass before the wound which it makes in a parent's heart can, if ever at all, be healed. But how far deeper is the gloom, and more acute the wound, when that child is an only child; when it is one on whom every hope, every joy has been centred; on whose preservation no anxiety, no care is thought too great. In such cases, the life of the parent is wound up in the life of the child, and when it fails, when death divides that bond, the survivor's lot must indeed be desolate.

And this was the lot of the chief mourner at the gate of Nain. She was a childless mother, and also a widow. I say the chief mourner, because there were many with her. The severity of her affliction had excited, and naturally too, the sympathy of her neighbours, and they flocked to assist at the last sad offices she was about to pay to the dear object of her defeated care. "Much people of the city was with her." Such a spectacle could not fail to attract the ready notice, and pity of our merciful Saviour. "When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not." He did not use many words. He knew that in such a moment, it would be useless to speak smooth things : that hers was a sorrow in which the kindest expressions, however well meant, would only serve to aggravate her pain. He knew that if she were to be comforted, it could only be through the working of a power beyond the reach of man to exercise. He knew that in the bier now borne slowly before her, lay buried the source of all her hopes, the spring of all her enjoyments : that if ever again in this world she was to wear a cheerful countenance, and recover herself from under the pressure of the calamity that now lay heavy upon her, it must be by the receiving again that which she had lost. He knew too by that Divine intelligence which could look into the future, that such a resto-

ration of her son to life again would be attended with good results; that it would attach the sorrower to Himself; that it would be in her, and also in her son, the beginning of a new and more spiritual life than as yet they had known; that henceforth they would become "dead unto sin, but alive unto God." And so, He not only pitied, but He succoured her. Without waiting for her to speak, He anticipated her fondest wishes. He touched the bier: and then when they that bare the body, struck by so unusual an interruption, halted in the way; when many mused in their hearts what this action might mean; then—in that moment when the attention of the surrounding crowd was fixed upon Himself—Jesus gave utterance to these simple but prevailing words, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise."

It was a brief command, and to many of the bystanders, no doubt appeared extravagant. It recalled to the lifeless corpse, the spirit that had already passed into eternity. It bid death let go a victim that seemed already secured. But it was the command of One mightier than death: and so it was obeyed. "He that was dead sat up, and began to speak, and He delivered him to his mother."

Who can penetrate into the depths of the fountain of joy which must have welled up in the mother's heart at this startling restoration of her son. The Evangelist himself has foreborne to describe

her feelings, and we need not attempt it. We can only estimate them in our minds by the measure of her late distress. According to her heaviness would be the proportion of her joy. Her son "was dead, and is alive again," he "was lost, and is found."

But though we are not told how the widow felt at this miraculous recovery of her child, thus delivered out of the very jaws of the grave; nor in what words she showed her thankfulness to our Lord: we *are* told the effect of the miracle upon the multitude, and that was this: "There came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up amongst us, and that God hath visited his people." They were afraid, and not without cause, for they felt themselves in the presence of a Being who, while He had like themselves the form of the Son of man, yet acted with the authority of God. Before One that could quicken the dead, and call "those things which be not, as though they were." They judged, and justly too, that He who could do such marvellous things with a simple sentence of His mouth, must indeed be the promised Deliverer. The veil which ignorance and prejudice had drawn so thick over their hearts, was for an instant lifted up, and they joyfully recognised in the lowly and humble Jesus, the long-expected Messiah. "They glorified God

saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us, and that God hath visited His people."

And now, my brethren, let us shortly collect some of the instructive lessons, which as Christians we should seek to glean from the account of our Lord's proceedings at Nain. And first, let us admire with humble thankfulness, the ready compassion which He shows for our human affliction. How truly does He teach by His own example, what He commands us by His Apostle, "to weep with those that mourn." How entirely does He show Himself to be acquainted with our griefs. Yes, and not only acquainted with them, but ready, and willing to relieve them. It is not, believe me, to the widow of Nain alone, that Christ's words, "weep not," are addressed, but to all who like her are in a season of bereavement and distress. Would that we could lay them to heart, for then we should be not a little comforted. Would that when some dear child, or relative is taken from us, we would learn to seek for consolation where it may be found, even in the pages of our Saviour's Gospel. Would that we could remember that we are not to be sorry as men "without hope" for them that sleep in the Lord Jesus. That though we cannot expect to see *our* dead raised to life again in this world, yet that we are assured on the strongest authority, by the promise of God who cannot lie, of their

rising again "in the resurrection at the last day." Would that after the first sharp pang occasioned by their loss, and the overflow of those tears which nature requires for its relief, we would bend ourselves in patient resignation to the wise disposal of our Heavenly Father, and cheer our hearts, and the hearts of our fellow mourners, with the prospect that revelation has opened to our view. Would, my brethren, that at such times, and at all times, we would cast our burden upon the Lord, and look forward with the eye of faith to the coming of that appointed day, when God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things shall have passed away."

Secondly, we are called upon to notice with all adoration and reverence, the awful display of our Saviour's power on this occasion. We have in it the strongest proof that could be afforded us of His being very God, and very Lord. Other prophets and servants of the Almighty have been enabled to work miracles, yes—even this greatest one—to raise the dead; but none in the way in which it was done by Christ. Elijah and Elisha are well known examples. Elijah was empowered to restore to the widow woman of Sarepta; Elisha to the good Shunamite, her son; but how were those miracles ac-

complished ? not without great effort, great struggling with death. Read the account in the fourth chapter of the Second Book of Kings, and you will see how different are God's own works, to the working of His most faithful servants.

First, Elisha sent his staff, and bid Gehazi lay it upon the face of the dead child : but to no purpose. There was neither voice nor hearing ; no sign of reviving animation. After this, the prophet came himself, and knelt down alone, and prayed by the side of the bed on which the child was laid. Nor was that all ; when he had prayed, " he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands ; and he stretched himself upon the child, and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro ; and went up, and stretched himself upon him ; and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes."

Compare this laborious recovery of the departed spirit, with the simple manner in which it was effected by our Lord. He was Lord of life and death. He had but to command, and it was done. " Young man, I say unto thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up and began to speak."

Lastly, let us look at the effect of this miracle upon those who were spectators of it. " There

came a fear on all, and they glorified God." They feared because, as I have observed, they were sensible of the presence of some great and glorious Being; because they felt that He who could so with a word give back a life, could also with a word take it away.

And shall not *we* fear Him as well? Shall not we learn from this, and from every other display of our Lord's might and majesty, a lesson of reverence and godly fear? Indeed, my brethren, it is right and fit for us so to do. That same Jesus who, in the days of his flesh, wrought such miracles of power, has a greater work yet to perform—a work whereof we all must be witnesses. To Him has the Father entrusted the high office of raising again all that have breathed, or ever shall breathe, in this world. "The hour is coming when they who are in their graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth." Yes, to every one of us will the Lord Jesus Christ address words like those with which He awakened the widow's son at Nain; "I say unto thee, arise."

Think how differently they will sound upon different ears in that awful hour! To some they will be as a sentence of rebuke, and condemnation. To the hardened and irreligious, to the lukewarm and indifferent—to these the summons to arise, will be

like a foretaste of their final doom. To others, to the godly, and religious, to those who died as they had lived, in the faith and fear of Christ, it will speak of comfort and of assured hope, and coming reward: and why? Because they will recognise in it the voice of Him whom, while on earth, they feared, and loved, and followed; and for whose sake they were willing to give up the pleasures of sin, and to endure, as good soldiers of the cross, all the hardships of the christian warfare.

God grant that we may be of this happy number! May He give us grace now in the day of our visitation, to mind the things which belong unto our true peace. May we learn to walk humbly with our God. May we accustom ourselves ever more and more to hearken to His voice which speaks to us in the Gospel, and to do whatever it commands us. May we never be ashamed to confess Christ before men. May we be enabled in all things to approve ourselves His faithful servants by much patience if need be, "in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses;" by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned."

So shall we best be fitted for an untroubled death, and for a joyful resurrection. When the Saviour's voice is once more heard, breaking for ever the

slumbers of the buried dead, we shall hail it with joy, we shall lift up our heads from the dust, as those who know that their redemption draweth nigh.

Hartley Wespall, Sept. 26, 1847.

SERMON XXIII.

WHO ARE CHRIST'S ENEMIES?

PHILIPPIANS iii. 18.—“The enemies of the cross of Christ.”

SUCH is the term applied by St. Paul to some of the members of the visible church of Christ at Philippi. He writes of them that they are enemies to his Master's cross. It is a serious and heavy accusation; and heavily did the making of it weigh upon the apostle's spirit, as we may judge by his own words: “Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.” And can we be surprised at this feeling? Can we wonder that a man, devoted as St. Paul was, heart and soul, to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the preaching of His gospel, should feel

bitterly the conduct of those pretended converts, who, while they professed in words to believe in Christ, yet in deeds denied Him? Can we wonder at the tears which they occasioned him, who, by the perversion of the holy doctrines which he taught, showed themselves not only to be indifferent, but altogether hostile to the Gospel? No, truly, there is reason enough to account for the vehemence of his grief. Yes, and there is reason enough why we, in reading of his affliction, should sympathize with and participate in it.

For, my brethren, is it not a sorrowful thought that so soon the prophecy of our Lord respecting His church should have been fulfilled? "Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Is it not sad to contemplate so quick a departure from the true faith; to know that within the narrow space of sixty years, after the death of Jesus on the cross,—the death which he endured for us sinful men,—even while some were yet living who had been spectators of His agony; there should be found within the fold of the Church, amongst those who had been baptized into the name of Christ, a number of men whose lives, and conversation were so at variance with the truth, as to call down upon them the open rebuke of an apostle; as to compel him who, in his zeal for his brethren made himself "all

things to all men," to denounce them as "the enemies of the cross of Christ?"

Surely, my brethren, no one can reflect on this and not be pained: no one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, but must feel pity, and indignation at such an exposure of man's weakness, and man's ingratitude. Nor will these feelings, I think, be lessened in intensity, if, from contemplating the conduct of our Lord's enemies at an early period of the Gospel preaching, we turn our minds to a scene nearer home: to the *character, and conduct of those who are Christ's enemies now*. Who these are, the marks by which they may be known, and what is revealed to us concerning their end, is the subject I would propose for our consideration this morning.

It is an inquiry, I need hardly say, of great interest to us all; for if, in the character of those who are denounced in the Scriptures as "the enemies of the Son of God," we recognise any point of resemblance to ourselves, or to any of our friends, and acquaintance, any in whom we have a near interest, then surely the language of the apostle may, by God's blessing, be made serviceable to our good. If taken home, and applied to our own case, it may act as a timely, and wholesome warning; may be the means of saving a soul from death; reconciling an enemy with his truest friend; a sinner with his God.

In such an examination, the safest guide to follow will be the sure Word of God. In it we shall find, without risk of incurring the charge of presumption or uncharitableness, the marks, and tokens by which the enemies of the Redeemer's cross are to be known. "Search the Scriptures," my brethren, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify" against you. But, as the Scriptures are a large volume, and can only be partially searched at one time, it will be enough for our purpose to-day to confine our attention to a particular passage in them,—a passage closely connected with the text—occurring in the same chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians—a passage wherein St. Paul gives us three distinct notes by which we may arrive at what we are in search of, and ascertain *who are "the enemies of the cross of Christ."* He tells us they are persons "*whose god is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.*"

First, then, of those who make their belly their god. It must be clear, I think, to you all, that the characters intended to be described in these words, are such as "live after the flesh, and not after the spirit." Men who take more thought for their bodies than for their souls; who find their highest pleasure in doing the very opposite to the directions of our Lord in the Gospel; whose whole

thought and chief care is, what they shall eat, what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed : whose profession of the christian religion only holds good while they receive comfort from it ; but who start aside and are offended, so soon as it calls on them to deny themselves any bodily delight ; to mortify their members upon earth ; to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. It is evident that all who are of this description, come within the range of the apostle's condemnation. They who are such, " serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly ;" and while they continue in their bondage, enslaved by their fleshly lusts, they are excluded from the promises of the Gospel ; they must be reckoned among the enemies of Him who came to make it known, and who bids us therein, not to labour " for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life."

Secondly, let us look at another class of the enemies of the cross of Christ. Those who have this mark, that their " glory is in their shame." They glory in those very acts of sin of which they ought to be ashamed ; acts I need not specifically name. It is not necessary, my brethren, to shock your ears by more than alluding to those who offend of malicious wickedness ; whose profligate, and profane lives are rendered doubly hateful by

the open avowal of their infamy : who sin in the sight of day, heedless alike of God and man. That such hardened recklessness should earn for those who manifest it the sad title of " enemies of the cross of Christ," cannot be a matter of surprise to any one. The only wonder is, that the Lord against whom they mock ; whose cross, and sufferings they set at nought, and trample as it were under foot, should bear so long, and so patiently with their insults. Unhappy and deluded ! are ye stronger than God, that ye dare to brave His anger ? Do ye not consider how in a moment your laughter might be turned into mourning, your scoffing, and contempt into despair ? Did you never hear this, which is written in God's book, " Fools make a mock at sin ?" And that other scripture which saith, " Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in thy youth, and walk in the way of thine heart, and in the light of thine eyes ; but know thou that for these things God will bring thee into judgment."

The third mark affixed to the enemies of the Saviour's cross by St. Paul is, that they " mind earthly things." And this is a mark that very many will on inquiry be found to bear. Many whose lives, when compared with the character above considered, would, but for this single cause, scarcely appear to warrant the application of so

harsh a name. But if by minding earthly things is meant that undue love of the world ; the too great care about its pleasures and its business ; that absorbing and engrossing attention to present objects which renders a man's heart less capable than it otherwise would be of higher, and holier considerations ; which causes him to lay up treasures here, as the first and foremost end of his being ; which shuts out the prospect of a better life, and prevents his making any preparation for it ; which keeps his thoughts fixed wholly upon uncertain riches, and will not let them rise to the contemplation of the only true riches, " the unsearchable riches of Christ ;" which makes him look at death with fear, because it threatens to take from him what he most prizes, and in what he most trusts ;—if this be that minding of earthly things which the apostle's words intend,—then verily in his judgment—and remember it is the judgment of a man wholly filled with the Spirit—the great majority of Christians at the present day would seem liable to the reproach of the text ; would be chargeable with being " enemies to the cross of Christ."

For so it undoubtedly is : the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, are the thorns, and briars which, as it was foretold, more than any other hindrance, choke the words of the Gospel, and make it unfruitful. And this not among one or

two classes only, but among all ranks, and degrees of professed believers, poor, as well as rich ; among those who need, as well as among those who have enough, and to spare. "Thou art careful and troubled about many things," is a reproach applicable more or less to us all. We are all too apt to lose sight of the "one thing needful," namely, preparation for God's kingdom in heaven : and losing sight of this, we spend our best days, and our best strength, and the best faculties of our mind, and body, in seeking to secure some short-lived enjoyment of this present time ; and not, as we are bound to do, in the service of our Maker and Redeemer.

And why, my brethren, do we act thus foolishly ? Wherefore do we "spend our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not ?" Surely it were better to turn our thoughts, and fix our affections upon Him who is above, and who is gone before to prepare a place for them that love Him. Surely it were better to mind how we might please the Lord, and to prove ourselves his true disciples, than to mind only, or chiefly, the things which we now see, regardless of the consequence which must ensue. That consequence is, we shall be counted as "enemies of the cross of Christ." For of this we may be well assured, we cannot in God's sight hold a neutral place ; we cannot be neither friends nor enemies to

the Gospel. The very fact that we are not the one, is the reason why we must be reckoned to be the other: "He that is not with me," saith the Lord, "is against me, and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth."

I have now shortly reviewed the three several marks by which St. Paul describes "the enemies of the cross of Christ." First, those who make their belly their god; secondly, those who glory in their shame; thirdly, those who mind earthly things. They are marks which, as we have seen, denote a very large class amongst Christians; but, alas! there are more behind: there are other enemies of Christ beside those mentioned in this part of the apostle's writings, but which are clearly pointed out elsewhere. Such are the self-righteous, those who overlook their natural infirmity, and arrogate to themselves a place in heaven through their own deservings; who dwell upon their decent life, their many charities, their abstaining from gross sins, as so many proofs of their right to be counted worthy of a blessed resurrection: in short, who lose sight of the one leading doctrine of our religion—that we are justified before God, not for anything that we can do, but for the sake of what His blessed Son Jesus Christ our righteousness hath done for us; and through faith in His blood.

Others there are, the opposite to these, who make

a parade of their sinfulness, who pretend to exalt the Saviour by increasing His burthen; who continue in sin that grace may abound; and such are amongst the worst of Christ's enemies. They make Him the minister of sin: sin for which He suffered in the body of His flesh upon the cross, that He might put it away. But I must not to-day enter into any further examination respecting the opponents of the Redeemer's cross.

I will now conclude with a few brief remarks upon the second point proposed for our consideration; upon the end of those who are Christ's enemies. In the words of St. Paul, their "end is destruction;" not necessarily destruction in this world, but destruction hereafter; separation from God, and happiness, and eternal banishment with the devils in their torment. This is indeed an awful doctrine; a doctrine upon which we none of us can like to dwell. But, my brethren, it is an infallible doctrine of the Bible. Everywhere in that sacred volume are we taught that the enemies of the Lord shall come to a fearful end. We may have difficulty in believing it, because we see so little manifestation of God's anger against His foes at present. But that difficulty is done away, when we remember that it is a part of the plan of that Divine government to let the evil, and the good partake together

of His temporal blessings; yes, and to associate together in the outward privileges of His church. "He sendeth rain upon the just, and the unjust, and maketh His sun to shine upon the evil, and the good." He keeps back till a later day the time of separation. The day of vengeance is in His hand, though mercy for the moment may restrain it: but come it will, at an hour when they are not aware, upon those guilty souls who now, it may be, rejoice in their unvisited iniquity, and count themselves safe, while they are at variance with their Lord!—safe, while at enmity with Christ!—safe, while opposed to Him who sitteth upon the circle of the heavens, who is King of kings, Lord of lords, who must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet! Who in their senses would count such a condition to be one of safety? Who in their senses would bear, if they knew it, to remain for an instant in such deadly peril? None, I trust, amongst you, my brethren. You need not, I am persuaded, be told that there is no safety for any man, except in reconciliation with the Father; in friendship with the Son. He Himself allows the title, else I had not ventured to make use of it. "Ye," says He, "are my friends, if ye do whatever I command you."

Let us, then, not hesitate to hearken to His gracious voice. Let us go gladly unto Christ, and at

His bidding take up the cross, and follow Him ; follow Him in all virtuous and godly living. Let us at His command learn to keep a check over our immoderate desires. Let us mortify our carnal appetites, and passions, and seek to bring, as far as may be, every thought of our hearts unto subjection to His holy law. Instead of being conformed to this world, let us be transformed in the spirit of our minds. Instead of laying up treasure here, let us lay up treasure in heaven. That is to say, let us cease caring so exclusively for earthly goods, and earthly enjoyments, and care more singly, and more sincerely for those good things which can never be taken from us ; for God ; for the knowledge of His truth ; for the rest prepared for His people.

In short, let us, by walking in the narrow path of our Master's Gospel, show ourselves to be what we are called by name—Christian men—men whose life is hid with Christ in God ; whose hope is beyond the grave ; and then we shall not be disappointed of our hope. When everything most prized by the world shall have passed away ; when to those who have had their portion, there remains only the bitterness of remorse ; when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed the second time from heaven, “ in flaming fire taking vengeance on His enemies,”—then shall we who have trusted in and

300

of I
get
"I
and
goe
sep
tho
cor
up
in
safi
safi
pos
hea
mu
fec
cor
we
in
my
to
re
th
ne
"

ci

[Faint, illegible text, possibly a signature or stamp]

SERMON XXIV.

LOT'S WIFE, HER END, AND ITS WARNING.

ST. LUKE xvii. 32.—“Remember Lot's wife.”

THE story of Lot's wife, and the calamity which befel her, is recorded for our warning in the nineteenth chapter of the book of Genesis.

That chapter gives, as you will at once remember, an account of the deliverance of Lot, and part of his family out of Sodom in the day when the Lord visited it, and its abominable inhabitants, as well as those of the other cities of the plain, with a total overthrow: in the day when He rained fire, and brimstone out of heaven, and miserably destroyed those wicked men, and burnt up their city. I must not this morning go into the particulars of that deliverance, except so far as it relates to the circum-

stance alluded to in the text ; namely, to the case of Lot's wife.

What is said of her is contained in a very few words. She is mentioned in the fifteenth and sixteenth verses, and again at the twenty-sixth verse, and that is all. In the two former we read that "when the morning arose"—the morning of the destruction of Sodom—"then the angels,"—those two angels whom God had sent for the double purpose of announcing His decree against the city, and of saving His righteous servant from the impending ruin,—“then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters which are here: lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life: look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plains; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.”

This command given by the angel of God was disregarded by Lot's wife: and the consequence was, that which is told us in the twenty-sixth verse ;
“She looked back from behind him, and she be-

came a pillar of salt." She lingered on her way, and hastened not to escape for her life ; she tempted God by her disobedience ; and that disobedience, that forbidden delay was her ruin. She was turned into a pillar of salt ; by which is supposed to be meant, that she was caught by the burning flames, which had by this time extended far across the plain ; she was caught by them and encrusted, as it were, by the particles of sulphur which they contained, and so instead of crumbling to ashes she remained after death in an upright position, a standing monument of the Almighty's wrath, which is revealed from heaven against all the children of disobedience.

Having said thus much upon the actual calamity that befel Lot's wife ; let us now go on to observe the connection of her name with the general subject of our Lord's discourse recorded in the seventeenth chapter of St. Luke's gospel, from whence my text is taken.

Jesus there alludes in awful but figurative language, to the disastrous ruin, about to fall on the Jewish nation ; this He likens to the day of judgment or coming of the Son of man ; and He speaks of the suddenness with which it will surprise them in these striking words : " As the lightning that lighteneth out of one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven ; so shall also the

Son of man be in His day." And then He gives a lively, but grievous picture of the state of carelessness, and unconcern, which would mark the generation that God was about to destroy, comparing it with the state of the old world before the flood; and to the state of Sodom just before its overthrow: "As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise, also, as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded: but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."

After this prophetic disclosure of the terrible event that was shortly to come upon the Jewish nation; our Lord, at the close of His address, offers them His counsel as to the course *they* should pursue, who would hope to escape in that day of His visitation. "In that day, he which shall be upon the house-top, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife." In other words, He warns them to flee out of the devoted city of

Jerusalem on the first appearance of its approaching overthrow—so soon as they should see it beset by the armies of Rome; to make haste and flee for their lives, into the neighbouring cities, and not to tarry within its walls, trusting to the strength of its fortifications, and from reluctance to be separated from their goods: He warns them against a moment's delay, and to enforce His warning, He calls to their minds the melancholy end of Lot's wife; He bids them remember how she perished through her folly; and He leaves them to draw their own conclusion from her example—the only conclusion that can be drawn—that if their sin be like hers, their punishment will be the same. They shall not escape for their rebellious wickedness, God in His displeasure shall cut them down.

But there is a further application to be made of the words before us, one that bears more immediately on our own condition, and this I will now endeavour to point out. Besides the coming of the Son of man to take vengeance upon the ungrateful Jews—those who rejected His merciful offers, and judged themselves unworthy of that eternal life, which was preached in His name—a coming that has long since been fulfilled, for Jerusalem, barely forty years after the time of this prophecy, was miserably and entirely destroyed, trodden down by the Gentiles, her inhabitants slain, and her

temple upraised from the foundations, so that literally not one stone was left upon another ; and that—because she did not know the day of her visitation,) besides this, His first coming, there is yet another, plainly made known to us in the Gospel : there is the coming of the same Son of man to judge the living, and the dead. Yes,—beside the days of vengeance that have past and gone over Judea, and which have left their marks still traceable in the ruin of that blighted land, there is another day, (and we know not how near its approach may be,) “ when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of ” His Son.

And observe, my brethren, in how many points these two comings are alike : or rather how the former is the type and forerunner of the latter. The destruction of Jerusalem was, as our Lord declared it would be, swift, and sudden. It came upon the people unprepared, living in ease and license, and hardened against adopting those means by which they could have been saved.

And are not these the very tokens by which Holy Scripture describes the coming of the Redeemer ? Is it not said that “ the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night,”—that “ when they shall say peace, and safety, then sudden destruction cometh

upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."

Yes, surely, the same ideas attach to both events, to the destruction of Jerusalem, and to the end of the world. The great majority of mankind will be found, it is to be feared, in that day, even as the Jews were in theirs,—eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, wholly occupied, and absorbed in the cares and concerns, the business, and pleasures of this life; and being so absorbed, that day will come upon them unawares; and as a snare. And why? Not because the Almighty willeth the death of sinners—not that He prepares His instruments of punishment, and at the same time hides His purpose from us. No;—but because he hath spoken and no one hears His voice—because although He hath declared that He will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, and has given us assurance of it by raising Him from the dead, yet for all this, men refuse to regard His word, and after their hardness, and impenitent hearts, treasure up wrath unto themselves against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

What wonder then if the vengeance which they thus wilfully, and knowingly provoke, be at last poured out upon them; what shadow of complaint can there be against God's holy justice, if that come upon the Gentiles, which in a temporal form has

already overtaken the Jews? "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil."

If such then, my brethren, be the resemblance between the past and the future—between what has been, and what is yet to be—assuredly the command which in the one case was given as a defence against the hour of peril, will be suitable no less in the other—assuredly, the advice which the Lord offered to the Jews in the day of their visitation, He offers equally to us in reference to a greater and more terrible day than that—even the day of judgment—that advice, that counsel, was to "remember Lot's wife."

Yes, my brethren, and is not this advice much required by, and very suitable to our condition? Is there not in the story of Lot's wife, in her sin, and in her punishment, much that is applicable to our times and situation in the world? What is the danger to which we are most exposed? that by which our eternal salvation is most in peril? Is it not the same as that which proved her ruin—lest we in our pilgrimage toward life and immortality should "look back from behind," stop in our onward course, and let our thoughts and feelings carry us back to the world and its seductive enjoyments and occupations; its sinful and forbidden pleasures; those pomps and vanities, those perishable delights, which by profession solemn and renewed, we have

all of us renounced and promised to abandon. This is the rock against which so many have in all ages made shipwreck of their souls ; *worldly-mindedness*—that undue love of this world's goods—that undue love of this world's concerns which is inconsistent with our relation to Almighty God, as His adopted children in Christ Jesus—inconsistent with our belief in the truth and reality of the Gospel promises.

For what says the Scripture upon this subject ? Does it not say in St. John's first Epistle, " Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." " Be not conformed to this world : but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind," says St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans ; and again St. James, " Whosoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God."

So far, then, the caution in my text is applicable to, and spoken of us all. We all, without exception, rich and poor, one with another, require continually to be put on our guard against the spirit of this world, lest we be swallowed up either on the one hand by over much relish for its pleasures, or on the other by over much care ; we have all need to be put in mind that the service of God and the service of Mammon are distinct things ; that we cannot give our affections to both ; that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.

But while such is the lesson that the text addresses to us all in common, it has a second and more particular admonition for a part of us: for that portion of Christians who are generally spoken of with esteem, as being more advanced in godliness than their brethren—that portion which recognizes, not in word only but in deed, the obligation under which they lie to Almighty God and to His Son: who look upon themselves as pledged to His service by the very terms of their baptismal covenant; and who to a certain point have endeavoured to redeem that pledge—have endeavoured (with success differing according to their efforts) to yield themselves, their souls and bodies, as members of righteousness unto holiness—have endeavoured to keep steadfastly in view the bright hope of their calling, and have striven to walk, as much as they were able, in the right direction towards it—have framed their lives and the lives of their families upon the only rule by which that hope can be secured—the rule of seeking the kingdom of God first and before all other things; and who by necessary consequence, thankfully have recourse to all those means of grace and pious observances which God has appointed in His church for the comfort and security of His people.

For persons of this description, (and some such, there may be amongst you, my brethren,) the use of the text is obviously great. In it they may find,

and of themselves they will be forward to find, a spur to animate their efforts, in the path which, through God's blessing, they have rightly chosen. They will not, if they are wise, refuse to be counselled against the danger of a *relapse*—of falling back into that worldly, careless, and unbelieving course of life, and conduct which they see followed by but too many around them ; and in which they themselves, it is probable, at one time walked.

No, my brethren, grateful as you must feel for having escaped so sad a condition as this ; grateful as you must be for having profited thus far in your religion, for having arrived at a decision, an unwavering decision, between God and the world : you will not, I am sure, be puffed up, nor exalted above measure at the progress you have made : rather you will be disposed to fear ; as did one far more advanced than yourselves—far more advanced than any of the present generation, you will be disposed to fear with St. Paul, lest after all you should be a castaway ; lest by any means, through the wiles and temptations of the wicked one ; through the lurking corruption of your own hearts, you should, when least you expect it, find an enemy in your path, and be brought again under the heavy yoke of bondage—the bondage of sin, and death. And surely such fear, such wholesome fear of falling away from God, instead of being shaken

off, as a feeling unworthy of your spiritual advancement, had better be nourished, and cherished with all humility in your hearts. Perfect love, it is true, will cast it out; but how far are any of us from perfect love! How far are any of us from loving God up to the measure of our Lord's commands, "with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind: and our neighbour as ourself!" When this shall be the case with us; when that which is perfect shall have come; then, and not till then, may the fear of final separation from God, and heaven be entirely done away.

Therefore, my brethren, do ye also, (as many as are of this number,) no less than others, take home to yourselves the language of our Lord in the text,—“Remember Lot's wife.” Remember that she in her day, was in a position not unlike that of yours. She had escaped, by God's good providence, from the wicked city devoted to destruction: you have, through the same providence, escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust, those unruly passions which tempt to great, and gross offences. She had her feet set forward in the path of safety; nay—she had made some progress in the way; and this too (in a spiritual sense) may be said of you. You may, I trust, be said with truth to have made straight paths for your feet; to have gone forth unto Christ “without

the camp;" to have counted the cost, and settled it in your heart to follow Him in all things, who "is the way, the truth, and the life—yes—and you may have made some advance in that way; some progress in the christian race. So far it seems well with both, It *seems*—but it was not really so with her: she looked back and perished: though duly charged to keep straight on, and stay not by the way, some fond remembrance, some lingering desire once again to see the city where she had dwelt, overpowered her obedience, and so wrought her destruction.

Let her example be your warning, and though at present, by God's grace you stand, "take heed lest you fall;" take heed lest Satan beguile you to repose too confidently upon your present attainments, or to cast one repining glance upon the follies and vanities of the world. Here you have no abiding place of rest; heaven, if you are true Christians, is your home; your continuing city is above. O then! set your affections wholly and entirely upon it! Have no more to do with your former conversation; forget it altogether, and all things else that are behind; and reach forward with new vigour to the things which are before—to the mark of the prize of your high calling in Christ Jesus: "Looking unto Him" with untiring steadfastness, "who is the Author and Finisher of your faith,"—"who for

the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God." Consider Him, my brethren, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds.

Little Hadham, July 3, 1846.

THE END.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY G. J. PALMER, SAVOY STREET, STRAND.

